

LITERATURE A-Z

An alphabet of international stories and poems, from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries. Humor, horror, science fiction, romance, folk tales, and adventure. This PDGazette compilation is formatted for e-readers; sources for all of these public domain works are found on Project Gutenberg.

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THE ADMIRAL by O. Henry
from Cabbages and Kings, eBook #2777

Spilled milk draws few tears from an Anchurian administration. Many are its lacteal sources; and the clocks' hands point forever to milking time. Even the rich cream skimmed from the treasury by the bewitched Miraflores did not cause the newly-installed patriots to waste time in unprofitable regrets. The government philosophically set about supplying the deficiency by increasing the import duties and by "suggesting" to wealthy private citizens that contributions according to their means would be considered patriotic and in order. Prosperity was expected to attend the reign of Losada, the new president. The ousted office-holders and military favourites organized a new "Liberal" party, and began to lay their plans for a re-succession. Thus the game of Anchurian politics began, like a Chinese comedy, to unwind slowly its serial length. Here and there Mirth peeps for an instant from the wings and illumines the florid lines.

A dozen quarts of champagne in conjunction with an informal sitting of the president and his cabinet led to the establishment of the navy and the appointment of Felipe Carrera as its admiral.

Next to the champagne the credit of the appointment belongs to Don Sabas Placido, the newly confirmed Minister of War.

The president had requested a convention of his cabinet for the discussion of questions politic and for the transaction of certain routine matters of state. The session had been signally tedious; the business and the wine prodigiously dry. A sudden, prankish humour of Don Sabas, impelling him to the deed, spiced the grave affairs of state with a whiff of agreeable playfulness.

In the dilatory order of business had come a bulletin from the coast department of Orilla del Mar reporting the seizure by the custom-house officers at the town of Coralio of the sloop _Estrella del Noche_ and her cargo of drygoods, patent medicines, granulated

sugar and three-star brandy. Also six Martini rifles and a barrel of American whisky. Caught in the act of smuggling, the sloop with its cargo was now, according to law, the property of the republic.

The Collector of Customs, in making his report, departed from the conventional forms so far as to suggest that the confiscated vessel be converted to the use of the government. The prize was the first capture to the credit of the department in ten years. The collector took opportunity to pat his department on the back.

It often happened that government officers required transportation from point to point along the coast, and means were usually lacking. Furthermore, the sloop could be manned by a loyal crew and employed as a coast guard to discourage the pernicious art of smuggling. The collector also ventured to nominate one to whom the charge of the boat could be safely intrusted--a young man of Coralio, Felipe Carrera--not, be it understood, one of extreme wisdom, but loyal and the best sailor along the coast.

It was upon this hint that the Minister of War acted, executing a rare piece of drollery that so enlivened the tedium of executive session.

In the constitution of this small, maritime banana republic was a forgotten section that provided for the maintenance of a navy. This provision--with many other wiser ones--had lain inert since the establishment of the republic. Anchuria had no navy and had no use for one. It was characteristic of Don Sabas--a man at once merry, learned, whimsical and audacious--that he should have disturbed the dust of this musty and sleeping statute to increase the humour of the world by so much as a smile from his indulgent colleagues.

With delightful mock seriousness the Minister of War proposed the creation of a navy. He argued its need and the glories it might achieve with such gay and witty zeal that the travesty overcame with its humour even the swart dignity of President Losada himself.

The champagne was bubbling trickily in the veins of the mercurial

statesmen. It was not the custom of the grave governors of Anchuria to enliven their sessions with a beverage so apt to cast a veil of disparagement over sober affairs. The wine had been a thoughtful compliment tendered by the agent of the Vesuvius Fruit Company as a token of amicable relations--and certain consummated deals--between that company and the republic of Anchuria.

The jest was carried to its end. A formidable, official document was prepared, encrusted with chromatic seals and jaunty with fluttering ribbons, bearing the florid signatures of state. This commission conferred upon el Señor Don Felipe Carrera the title of Flag Admiral of the Republic of Anchuria. Thus within the space of a few minutes and the dominion of a dozen "extra dry," the country took its place among the naval powers of the world, and Felipe Carrera became entitled to a salute of nineteen guns whenever he might enter port.

The southern races are lacking in that particular kind of humour that finds entertainment in the defects and misfortunes bestowed by Nature. Owing to this defect in their constitution they are not moved to laughter (as are their northern brothers) by the spectacle of the deformed, the feeble-minded or the insane.

Felipe Carrera was sent upon earth with but half his wits. Therefore, the people of Coralio called him "_El pobrecito loco_"--"the poor little crazed one"--saying that God had sent but half of him to earth, retaining the other half.

A sombre youth, glowering, and speaking only at the rarest times, Felipe was but negatively "loco." On shore he generally refused all conversation. He seemed to know that he was badly handicapped on land, where so many kinds of understanding are needed; but on the water his one talent set him equal with most men. Few sailors whom God had carefully and completely made could handle a sailboat as well. Five points nearer the wind than even the best of them he could sail his sloop. When the elements raged and set other men to cowering, the deficiencies of Felipe seemed of little importance. He was a perfect sailor, if an imperfect man. He owned no boat, but worked among the crews of the schooners and sloops that skimmed the

coast, trading and freighting fruit out to the steamers where there was no harbour. It was through his famous skill and boldness on the sea, as well as for the pity felt for his mental imperfections, that he was recommended by the collector as a suitable custodian of the captured sloop.

When the outcome of Don Sabas' little pleasantry arrived in the form of the imposing and preposterous commission, the collector smiled. He had not expected such prompt and overwhelming response to his recommendation. He despatched a *_muchacho_* at once to fetch the future admiral.

The collector waited in his official quarters. His office was in the Calle Grande, and the sea breezes hummed through its windows all day. The collector, in white linen and canvas shoes, philandered with papers on an antique desk. A parrot, perched on a pen rack, seasoned the official tedium with a fire of choice Castilian imprecations. Two rooms opened into the collector's. In one the clerical force of young men of variegated complexions transacted with glitter and parade their several duties. Through the open door of the other room could be seen a bronze babe, guiltless of clothing, that rollicked upon the floor. In a grass hammock a thin woman, tinted a pale lemon, played a guitar and swung contentedly in the breeze. Thus surrounded by the routine of his high duties and the visible tokens of agreeable domesticity, the collector's heart was further made happy by the power placed in his hands to brighten the fortunes of the "innocent" Felipe.

Felipe came and stood before the collector. He was a lad of twenty, not ill-favoured in looks, but with an expression of distant and pondering vacuity. He wore white cotton trousers, down the seams of which he had sewed red stripes with some vague aim at military decoration. A flimsy blue shirt fell open at his throat; his feet were bare; he held in his hand the cheapest of straw hats from the States.

"Señor Carrera," said the collector, gravely, producing the showy commission, "I have sent for you at the president's bidding. This

document that I present to you confers upon you the title of Admiral of this great republic, and gives you absolute command of the naval forces and fleet of our country. You may think, friend Felipe, that we have no navy--but yes! The sloop the *Estrella del Noche*, that my brave men captured from the coast smugglers, is to be placed under your command. The boat is to be devoted to the services of your country. You will be ready at all times to convey officials of the government to points along the coast where they may be obliged to visit. You will also act as a coast-guard to prevent, as far as you may be able, the crime of smuggling. You will uphold the honour and prestige of your country at sea, and endeavour to place Anchuria among the proudest naval powers of the world. These are your instructions as the Minister of War desires me to convey them to you. *Por Dios!* I do not know how all this is to be accomplished, for not one word did his letter contain in respect to a crew or to the expenses of this navy. Perhaps you are to provide a crew yourself, Señor Admiral--I do not know--but it is a very high honour that has descended upon you. I now hand you your commission. When you are ready for the boat I will give orders that she shall be made over into your charge. That is as far as my instructions go."

Felipe took the commission that the collector handed to him. He gazed through the open window at the sea for a moment, with his customary expression of deep but vain pondering. Then he turned without having spoken a word, and walked swiftly away through the hot sand of the street.

"*Pobrecito loco!*" sighed the collector; and the parrot on the pen racks screeched "*Loco!--loco!--loco!*"

The next morning a strange procession filed through the streets to the collector's office. At its head was the admiral of the navy. Somewhere Felipe had raked together a pitiful semblance of a military uniform--a pair of red trousers, a dingy blue short jacket heavily ornamented with gold braid, and an old fatigue cap that must have been cast away by one of the British soldiers in Belize and brought away by Felipe on one of his coasting voyages. Buckled around his waist was an ancient ship's cutlass contributed to his equipment by

Pedro Lafitte, the baker, who proudly asserted its inheritance from his ancestor, the illustrious buccaneer. At the admiral's heels tagged his newly-shipped crew--three grinning, glossy, black Caribs, bare to the waist, the sand spurting in showers from the spring of their naked feet.

Briefly and with dignity Felipe demanded his vessel of the collector. And now a fresh honour awaited him. The collector's wife, who played the guitar and read novels in the hammock all day, had more than a little romance in her placid, yellow bosom. She had found in an old book an engraving of a flag that purported to be the naval flag of Anchuria. Perhaps it had so been designed by the founders of the nation; but, as no navy had ever been established, oblivion had claimed the flag. Laboriously with her own hands she had made a flag after the pattern--a red cross upon a blue-and-white ground. She presented it to Felipe with these words: "Brave sailor, this flag is of your country. Be true, and defend it with your life. Go you with God."

For the first time since his appointment the admiral showed a flicker of emotion. He took the silken emblem, and passed his hand reverently over its surface. "I am the admiral," he said to the collector's lady. Being on land he could bring himself to no more exuberant expression of sentiment. At sea with the flag at the masthead of his navy, some more eloquent exposition of feelings might be forthcoming.

Abruptly the admiral departed with his crew. For the next three days they were busy giving the Estrella del Noche a new coat of white paint trimmed with blue. And then Felipe further adorned himself by fastening a handful of brilliant parrot's plumes in his cap. Again he tramped with his faithful crew to the collector's office and formally notified him that the sloop's name had been changed to El Nacional.

During the next few months the navy had its troubles. Even an admiral is perplexed to know what to do without any orders. But none came. Neither did any salaries. El Nacional swung idly at anchor.

When Felipe's little store of money was exhausted he went to the

collector and raised the question of finances.

"Salaries!" exclaimed the collector, with hands raised; "_Valgame Dios!_ not one _centavo_ of my own pay have I received for the last seven months. The pay of an admiral, do you ask? _Quién sabe?_ Should it be less than three thousand _pesos_? _Mira!_ you will see a revolution in this country very soon. A good sign of it is when the government calls all the time for _pesos_, _pesos_, _pesos_, and pays none out."

Felipe left the collector's office with a look almost of content on his sombre face. A revolution would mean fighting, and then the government would need his services. It was rather humiliating to be an admiral without anything to do, and have a hungry crew at your heels begging for _reales_ to buy plantains and tobacco with.

When he returned to where his happy-go-lucky Caribs were waiting they sprang up and saluted, as he had drilled them to do.

"Come, _muchachos_, " said the admiral; "it seems that the government is poor. It has no money to give us. We will earn what we need to live upon. Thus will we serve our country. Soon"--his heavy eyes almost lighted up--"it may gladly call upon us for help."

Thereafter _El Nacional_ turned out with the other coast craft and became a wage-earner. She worked with the lighters freighting bananas and oranges out to the fruit steamers that could not approach nearer than a mile from the shore. Surely a self-supporting navy deserves red letters in the budget of any nation.

After earning enough at freighting to keep himself and his crew in provisions for a week Felipe would anchor the navy and hang about the little telegraph office, looking like one of the chorus of an insolvent comic opera troupe besieging the manager's den. A hope for orders from the capital was always in his heart. That his services as admiral had never been called into requirement hurt his pride and patriotism. At every call he would inquire, gravely and expectantly, for despatches. The operator would pretend to make a search, and then

reply:

"Not yet, it seems, _Señor el Almirante--poco tiempo!_"

Outside in the shade of the lime-trees the crew chewed sugar cane or slumbered, well content to serve a country that was contented with so little service.

One day in the early summer the revolution predicted by the collector flamed out suddenly. It had long been smouldering. At the first note of alarm the admiral of the navy force and fleet made all sail for a larger port on the coast of a neighbouring republic, where he traded a hastily collected cargo of fruit for its value in cartridges for the five Martini rifles, the only guns that the navy could boast. Then to the telegraph office sped the admiral. Sprawling in his favourite corner, in his fast-decaying uniform, with his prodigious sabre distributed between his red legs, he waited for the long-delayed, but now soon expected, orders.

"Not yet, _Señor el Almirante_, " the telegraph clerk would call to him--"_poco tiempo!_"

At the answer the admiral would plump himself down with a great rattling of scabbard to await the infrequent tick of the little instrument on the table.

"They will come," would be his unshaken reply; "I am the admiral."

THE BEST SAUCE by P. G. Wodehouse
from Death At The Excelsior
Project Gutenberg EBook #8176

Eve Hendrie sat up in bed. For two hours she had been trying to get to sleep, but without success. Never in her life had she felt more wakeful.

There were two reasons for this. Her mind was disturbed, and she was very hungry. Neither sensation was novel to her. Since first she had become paid companion to Mrs. Rastall-Retford there had hardly been a moment when she had not been hungry. Some time before Mrs. Rastall-Retford's doctor had recommended to that lady a Spartan diet, and in this Eve, as companion, had unwillingly to share. It was not pleasant for either of them, but at least Mrs. Rastall-Retford had the knowledge that she had earned it by years of honest self-indulgence. Eve had not that consolation.

Meagre fare, moreover, had the effect of accentuating Mrs. Rastall-Retford's always rather pronounced irritability. She was a massive lady, with a prominent forehead, some half-dozen chins, and a manner towards those in her employment which would have been resented in a second mate by the crew of a Western ocean tramp. Even at her best she was no ray of sunshine about the house. And since the beginning of the self-denying ordinance she had been at her worst.

But it was not depression induced by her employer that was disturbing Eve. That was a permanent evil. What was agitating her so extremely to-night was the unexpected arrival of Peter Rayner.

It was Eve's practice to tell herself several times a day that she had no sentiment for Peter Rayner but dislike. She did not attempt to defend her attitude logically, but nevertheless she clung to it, and to-night, when he entered the drawing-room, she had endeavoured to convey by her manner that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she remembered him at all, and that, having accomplished that feat, she now intended to forget him again immediately. And he had grinned a

cheerful, affectionate grin, and beamed on her without a break till bedtime.

Before coming as companion to Mrs. Rastall-Retford Eve had been governess to Hildebrand, aged six, the son of a Mrs. Elphinstone. It had been, on the whole, a comfortable situation. She had not liked Mrs. Elphinstone, but Hildebrand had been docile, and altogether life was quite smooth and pleasant until Mrs. Elphinstone's brother came for a visit. Peter Rayner was that brother.

There is a type of man who makes love with the secrecy and sheepish reserve of a cowboy shooting up a Wild West saloon. To this class Peter belonged. He fell in love with Eve at sight, and if, at the end of the first day, there was anyone in the house who was not aware of it, it was only Hildebrand, aged six. And even Hildebrand must have had his suspicions.

Mrs. Elphinstone was among the first to become aware of it. For two days, frostily silent and gimlet-like as to the eye, she observed Peter's hurricane wooing from afar; then she acted. Peter she sent to London, pacifying him with an invitation to return to the house in the following week. This done, she proceeded to eliminate Eve. In the course of the parting interview she expressed herself perhaps a little less guardedly than was either just or considerate; and Eve, flushed and at war with the whole race of Rayners, departed that afternoon to seek a situation elsewhere. She had found it at the house of Mrs. Rastall-Retford.

And now this evening, as she sat in the drawing-room playing the piano to her employer, in had walked the latter's son, a tall, nervous young man, perpetually clearing his throat and fiddling with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, with the announcement that he had brought his friend, Mr. Rayner, to spend a few days in the old home.

Eve could still see the look on Peter's face as, having shaken hands with his hostess, he turned to her. It was the look of the cowboy who, his weary ride over, sees through the dusk the friendly gleam of the saloon windows, and with a happy sigh reaches for his revolver. There

could be no two meanings to that look. It said, as clearly as if he had shouted it, that this was no accidental meeting; that he had tracked her down and proposed to resume matters at the point where they had left off.

Eve was indignant. It was abominable that he should pursue her in this way. She sat thinking how abominable it was for five minutes; and then it suddenly struck her that she was hungrier than ever. She had forgotten her material troubles for the moment. It seemed to her now that she was quite faint with hunger.

A cuckoo clock outside the door struck one. And, as it did so, it came to Eve that on the sideboard in the dining-room there were biscuits.

A moment later she was creeping softly down the stairs.

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It was dark and ghostly on the stairs. The house was full of noises. She was glad when she reached the dining-room. It would be pleasant to switch on the light. She pushed open the door, and uttered a cry. The light was already switched on, and at the table, his back to her, was a man.

There was no time for flight. He must have heard the door open. In another moment he would turn and spring.

She spoke tremulously.

"Don't--don't move. I'm pointing a pistol at you."

The man did not move.

"Foolish child!" he said, indulgently. "Suppose it went off!"

She uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You! What are you doing here, Mr. Rayner?"

She moved into the room, and her relief changed swiftly into indignation. On the table were half a chicken, a loaf, some cold potatoes, and a bottle of beer.

"I'm eating, thank goodness!" said Peter, helping himself to a cold potato. "I had begun to think I never should again."

"Eating!"

"Eating. I know a man of sensibility and refinement ought to shrink from raiding his hostess's larder in the small hours, but hunger's death to the finer feelings. It's the solar plexus punch which puts one's better self down and out for the count of ten. I am a large and healthy young man, and, believe me, I need this little snack. I need it badly. May I cut you a slice of chicken?"

She could hardly bear to look at it, but pride gave her strength.

"No," she snapped.

"You're sure? Poor little thing; I know you're half starved."

Eve stamped.

"How dare you speak to me like that, Mr. Rayner?"

He drank bottled beer thoughtfully.

"What made you come down? I suppose you heard a noise and thought it was burglars?" he said.

"Yes," said Eve, thankfully accepting the idea. At all costs she must conceal the biscuit motive.

"That was very plucky of you. Won't you sit down?"

"No, I'm going back to bed."

"Not just yet. I've several things to talk to you about. Sit down. That's right. Now cover up your poor little pink ankles, or you'll be catching----"

She started up.

"Mr. Rayner!"

"Sit down."

She looked at him defiantly, then, wondering at herself for doing it, sat down.

"Now," said Peter, "what do you mean by it? What do you mean by dashing off from my sister's house without leaving a word for me as to where you were going? You knew I loved you."

"Good night, Mr. Rayner."

"Sit down. You've given me a great deal of trouble. Do you know it cost me a sovereign in tips to find out your address? I couldn't get it out of my sister, and I had to apply to the butler. I've a good mind to knock it off your first week's pin-money."

"I shall not stay here listening----"

"You knew perfectly well I wanted to marry you. But you fly off without a word and bury yourself in this benighted place with a gorgon who nags and bullies you----"

"A nice way to speak of your hostess," said Eve, scornfully.

"A very soothing way. I don't think I ever took such a dislike to a woman at first sight before. And when she started to bullyrag you, it was all I could do--But it won't last long now. You must come away at once. We'll be married after Christmas, and in the meantime you can go and live with my sister----"

Eve listened speechlessly. She had so much to say that the difficulty of selection rendered her dumb.

"When can you start? I mean, do you have to give a month's notice or anything?"

Eve got up with a short laugh.

"Good night, Mr. Rayner," she said. "You have been very amusing, but I am getting tired."

"I'm glad it's all settled," said Peter. "Good night."

Eve stopped. She could not go tamely away without saying a single one of the things that crowded in her mind.

"Do you imagine," she said, "that I intend to marry you? Do you suppose, for one moment----"

"Rather!" said Peter. "You shall have a splendid time from now on, to make up for all you've gone through. I'm going to be awfully good to you, Eve. You sha'n't ever have any more worries, poor old thing." He looked at her affectionately. "I wonder why it is that large men always fall in love with little women. There are you, a fragile, fairy-like, ethereal wisp of a little creature; and here am I----"

"A great, big, greedy pig!" burst out Eve, "who thinks about nothing but eating and drinking."

"I wasn't going to have put it quite like that," said Peter, thoughtfully.

"I hate a greedy man," said Eve, between her teeth.

"I have a healthy appetite," protested Peter. "Nothing more. It runs in the family. At the time of the Civil War the Rayner of the period, who was King Charles's right-hand man, would frequently eat despatches to

prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. He was noted for it."

Eve reached the door and turned.

"I despise you," she said.

"Good night," said Peter, tenderly. "To-morrow morning we'll go for a walk."

His prediction proved absolutely correct. He was smoking a cigarette after breakfast when Eve came to him. Her face was pink and mutinous, but there was a gleam in her eye.

"Are you ready to come out, Mr. Rayner?" she said. "Mrs. Rastall-Retford says I'm to take you to see the view from the golf links."

"You'll like that," said Peter.

"I shall not like it," snapped Eve. "But Mrs. Rastall-Retford is paying me a salary to do what she tells me, and I have to earn it."

Conversation during the walk consisted mainly of a monologue on the part of Peter. It was a crisp and exhilarating morning, and he appeared to be feeling a universal benevolence towards all created things. He even softened slightly on the subject of Mrs. Rastall-Retford, and advanced the theory that her peculiar manner might be due to her having been ill-treated as a child.

Eve listened in silence. It was not till they were nearing home on their return journey that she spoke.

"Mr. Rayner," she said.

"Yes?" said Peter.

"I was talking to Mrs. Rastall-Retford after breakfast," said Eve, "and I told her something about you."

"My conscience is clear."

"Oh, nothing bad. Some people would say it was very much to your credit." She looked away across the fields. "I told her you were a vegetarian," she added, carelessly.

There was a long silence. Then Peter spoke three words, straight from the heart.

"You little devil!"

Eve turned and looked at him, her eyes sparkling wickedly.

"You see!" she said. "Now perhaps you will go."

"Without you?" said Peter, stoutly. "Never!"

"In London you will be able to eat all day--anything you like. You will be able to creep about your club gnawing cold chicken all night. But if you stay here----"

"You have got a wrong idea of the London clubman's life," said Peter. "If I crept about my club gnawing cold chicken I should have the committee after me. No, I shall stay here and look after you. After all, what is food?"

"I'll tell you what yours will be, if you like. Or would you rather wait and let it be a surprise? Well, for lunch you will have some boiled potatoes and cabbage and a sweet--a sort of light _soufflé_ thing. And for dinner----"

"Yes, but one moment," said Peter. "If I'm a vegetarian, how did you account for my taking all the chicken I could get at dinner last night, and looking as if I wanted more?"

"Oh, that was your considerateness. You didn't want to give trouble, even if you had to sacrifice your principles. But it's all right now.

You are going to have your vegetables."

Peter drew a deep breath--the breath of the man who braces himself up and thanks whatever gods there be for his unconquerable soul.

"I don't care," he said. "A book of verses underneath the bough, a jug of wine, and thou----"

"Oh, and I forgot," interrupted Eve. "I told her you were a teetotaller as well."

There was another silence, longer than the first.

"The best train," said Eve, at last, "is the ten-fifty."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"The best train?"

"For London."

"What makes you think that I am interested in trains to London?"

Eve bit her lip.

"Mr. Rayner," she said, after a pause, "do you remember at lunch one day at Mrs. Elphinstone's refusing parsnips? You said that, so far as you were concerned, parsnips were first by a mile, and that prussic acid and strychnine also ran."

"Well?" said Peter.

"Oh, nothing," said Eve. "Only I made a stupid mistake. I told the cook you were devoted to parsnips. I'm sorry."

Peter looked at her gravely. "I'm putting up with a lot for your sake," he said.

"You needn't. Why don't you go away?"

"And leave you chained to the rock, Andromeda? Not for Perseus! I've only been here one night, but I've seen enough to know that I've got to take you away from this place. Honestly, it's killing you. I was watching you last night. You're scared if that infernal old woman starts to open her mouth. She's crushing the life out of you. I'm going to stay on here till you say you'll marry me, or till they throw me out."

"There are parsnips for dinner to-night," said Eve, softly.

"I shall get to like them. They are an acquired taste, I expect. Perhaps I am, too. Perhaps I am the human parsnip, and you will have to learn to love me."

"You are the human burr," said Eve, shortly. "I shouldn't have thought it possible for a man to behave as you are doing."

* * * * *

In spite of herself, there were moments during the next few days when Eve felt twinges of remorse. It was only by telling herself that he had no right to have followed her to this house, and that he was at perfect liberty to leave whenever he wished, that she could harden her heart again. And even this reflection was not entirely satisfactory, for it made her feel how fond he must be of her to endure these evils for her sake.

And there was no doubt about there being evils. It was a dreary house in which to spend winter days. There were no books that one could possibly read. The nearest railway station was five miles away. There was not even a dog to talk to. Generally it rained. Though Eve saw little of Peter, except at meals and in the drawing-room after dinner--for Mrs. Rastall-Retford spent most of the day in her own sitting-room and required Eve to be at her side--she could picture his sufferings, and, try as she would, she could not keep herself from softening a little. Her pride was weakening. Constant attendance on her

employer was beginning to have a bad effect on her nerves. Association in a subordinate capacity with Mrs. Rastall-Retford did not encourage a proud and spirited outlook on life.

Her imagination had not exaggerated Peter's sufferings. Many people consider that Dante has spoken the last word on the post-mortem housing of the criminal classes. Peter, after the first week of his visit, could have given him a few new ideas.

* * * * *

It is unpleasant to be half starved. It is unpleasant to be cooped up in a country-house in winter with nothing to do. It is unpleasant to have to sit at meals and listen to the only girl you have ever really loved being bullyragged by an old lady with six chins. And all these unpleasantnesses were occurring to Peter simultaneously. It is highly creditable to him that the last should completely have outweighed the others.

He was generally alone. Mr. Rastall-Retford, who would have been better than nothing as a companion, was a man who enjoyed solitude. He was a confirmed vanisher. He would be present at one moment, the next he would have glided silently away. And, even on the rare occasions when he decided not to vanish, he seldom did much more than clear his throat nervously and juggle with his pince-nez.

Peter, in his boyhood, had been thrilled once by a narrative of a man who got stuck in the Sargasso Sea. It seemed to him now that the monotony of the Sargasso Sea had been greatly exaggerated.

Nemesis was certainly giving Peter his due. He had wormed his way into the Rastall-Retford home-circle by grossly deceitful means. The moment he heard that Eve had gone to live with Mrs. Rastall-Retford, and had ascertained that the Rastall-Retford with whom he had been at Cambridge and whom he still met occasionally at his club when he did not see him first, was this lady's son, he had set himself to court young Mr. Rastall-Retford. He had cornered him at the club and begun to talk about the dear old 'Varsity days, ignoring the embarrassment of the

latter, whose only clear recollection of the dear old 'Varsity days as linking Peter and himself was of a certain bump-supper night, when sundry of the festive, led and inspired by Peter, had completely wrecked his rooms and shaved off half a growing moustache. He conveyed to young Mr. Rastall-Retford the impression that, in the dear old 'Varsity days, they had shared each other's joys and sorrows, and, generally, had made Damon and Pythias look like a pair of cross-talk knockabouts at one of the rowdier music-halls. Not to invite so old a friend to stay at his home, if he ever happened to be down that way, would, he hinted, be grossly churlish. Mr. Rastall-Retford, impressed, issued the invitation. And now Peter was being punished for his deceit. Nemesis may not be an Alfred Shrub, but give her time and she gets there.

* * * * *

It was towards the middle of the second week of his visit that Eve, coming into the drawing-room before dinner, found Peter standing in front of the fire. They had not been alone together for several days.

"Well?" said he.

Eve went to the fire and warmed her hands.

"Well?" she said, dispiritedly.

She was feeling nervous and ill. Mrs. Rastall-Retford had been in one of her more truculent moods all day, and for the first time Eve had the sensation of being thoroughly beaten. She dreaded the long hours to bedtime. The thought that there might be bridge after dinner made her feel physically ill. She felt she could not struggle through a bridge night.

On the occasions when she was in one of her dangerous moods, Mrs. Rastall-Retford sometimes chose rest as a cure, sometimes relaxation. Rest meant that she retired to her room immediately after dinner, and expended her venom on her maid; relaxation meant bridge, and bridge seemed to bring out all her worst points. They played the game for

counters at her house, and there had been occasions in Eve's experience when the loss of a hundred or so of these useful little adjuncts to Fun in the Home had lashed her almost into a frenzy. She was one of those bridge players who keep up a running quarrel with Fate during the game, and when she was not abusing Fate she was generally reproaching her partner. Eve was always her partner; and to-night she devoutly hoped that her employer would elect to rest. She always played badly with Mrs. Rastall-Retford, through sheer nervousness. Once she had revoked, and there had been a terrible moment and much subsequent recrimination.

Peter looked at her curiously.

"You're pale to-night," he said.

"I have a headache."

"H'm! How is our hostess? Fair? Or stormy?"

"As I was passing her door I heard her bullying her maid, so I suppose stormy."

"That means a bad time for you?" he said, sympathetically.

"I suppose so. If we play bridge. But she may go to bed directly after dinner."

She tried to keep her voice level, but he detected the break.

"Eve," he said, quickly, "won't you let me take you away from here? You've no business in this sort of game. You're not tough enough. You've got to be loved and made a fuss of and----"

She laughed shakily.

"Perhaps you can give me the address of some lady who wants a companion to love and make a fuss of?"

"I can give you the address of a man."

She rested an arm on the mantelpiece and stood looking into the blaze, without replying.

Before he could speak again there was a step outside the door, and Mrs. Rastall-Retford rustled into the room.

Eve had not misread the storm-signals. Her employer's mood was still as it had been earlier in the day. Dinner passed in almost complete silence. Mrs. Rastall-Retford sat brooding dumbly. Her eye was cold and menacing, and Peter, working his way through his vegetables, shuddered for Eve. He had understood her allusion to bridge, having been privileged several times during his stay to see his hostess play that game, and he hoped that there would be no bridge to-night.

And this was unselfish of him, for bridge meant sandwiches. Punctually at nine o'clock on bridge nights the butler would deposit on a side-table a plate of chicken sandwiches and (in deference to Peter's vegetarian views) a smaller plate of cheese sandwiches. At the close of play Mrs. Rastall-Retford would take one sandwich from each plate, drink a thimbleful of weak whisky and water, and retire.

Peter could always do with a sandwich or two these days. But he was prepared to abandon them joyfully if his hostess would waive bridge for this particular evening.

It was not to be. In the drawing-room Mrs. Rastall-Retford came out of her trance and called imperiously for the cards. Peter, when he saw his hand after the first deal, had a presentiment that if all his hands were to be as good as this, the evening was going to be a trying one. On the other occasions when they had played he had found it an extremely difficult task, even with moderate cards, to bring it about that his hostess should always win the odd rubber, for he was an excellent player, and, like most good players, had an artistic conscience which made it painful to him to play a deliberately bad game, even from the best motives. If all his hands were going to be as strong as this first one he saw that there was disaster ahead. He could not help winning.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford, who had dealt the first hand, made a most improper diamond declaration. Her son unfilially doubled, and, Eve having chicane--a tragedy which her partner evidently seemed to consider could have been avoided by the exercise of ordinary common sense--Peter and his partner, despite Peter's best efforts, won the game handsomely.

The son of the house dealt the next hand. Eve sorted her cards listlessly. She was feeling curiously tired. Her brain seemed dulled.

This hand, as the first had done, went all in favour of the two men. Mr. Rastall-Retford won five tricks in succession, and, judging from the glitter in his mild eye, was evidently going to win as many more as he possibly could. Mrs. Rastall-Retford glowered silently. There was electricity in the air.

The son of the house led a club. Eve played a card mechanically.

"Have you no clubs, Miss Hendrie?"

Eve started, and looked at her hand.

"No," she said.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford grunted suspiciously.

Not long ago, in Westport, Connecticut, U.S.A., a young man named Harold Sperry, a telephone worker, was boring a hole in the wall of a house with a view to passing a wire through it. He whistled joyously as he worked. He did not know that he had selected for purposes of perforation the exact spot where there lay, nestling in the brickwork, a large leaden water-pipe. The first intimation he had of that fact was when a jet of water suddenly knocked him fifteen feet into a rosebush.

As Harold felt then, so did Eve now, when, examining her hand once more to make certain that she had no clubs, she discovered the ace of that ilk peeping coyly out from behind the seven of spades.

Her face turned quite white. It is never pleasant to revoke at bridge, but to Eve just then it seemed a disaster beyond words. She looked across at her partner. Her imagination pictured the scene there would be ere long, unless----

It happens every now and then that the human brain shows in a crisis an unwonted flash of speed. Eve's did at this juncture. To her in her trouble there came a sudden idea.

She looked round the table. Mr. Rastall-Retford, having taken the last trick, had gathered it up in the introspective manner of one planning big _coups_, and was brooding tensely, with knit brows. His mother was frowning over her cards. She was unobserved.

She seized the opportunity. She rose from her seat, moved quickly to the side-table, and, turning her back, slipped the fatal card dexterously into the interior of a cheese sandwich.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford, absorbed, did not notice for an instant. Then she gave tongue.

"What are you doing, Miss Hendrie?"

Eve was breathing quickly.

"I--I thought that Mr. Rayner might like a sandwich."

She was at his elbow with the plate. It trembled in her hand.

"A sandwich! Kindly do not be so officious, Miss Hendrie. The idea--in the middle of a hand----" Her voice died away in a resentful mumble.

Peter started. He had been allowing his thoughts to wander. He looked from the sandwich to Eve and then at the sandwich again. He was puzzled. This had the aspect of being an olive-branch--could it be? Could she be meaning----? Or was it a subtle insult? Who could say? At any rate it was a sandwich, and he seized it, without prejudice.

"I hope at least you have had the sense to remember that Mr. Rayner is a vegetarian, Miss Hendrie," said Mrs. Rastall-Retford. "That is not a chicken sandwich?"

"No," said Eve; "it is not a chicken sandwich."

Peter beamed gratefully. He raised the olive-branch, and bit into it with the energy of a starving man. And as he did so he caught Eve's eye.

"Miss Hendrie!" cried Mrs. Rastall-Retford.

Eve started violently.

"Miss Hendrie, will you be good enough to play? The king of clubs to beat. I can't think what's the matter with you to-night."

"I'm very sorry," said Eve, and put down the nine of spades.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford glared.

"This is absurd," she cried. "You must have the ace of clubs. If you have not got it, who has? Look through your hand again. Is it there?"

"No."

"Then where can it be?"

"Where can it be?" echoed Peter, taking another bite.

"Why--why," said Eve, crimson, "I--I--have only five cards. I ought to have six."

"Five?" said Mrs. Rastall-Retford "Nonsense! Count again. Have you dropped it on the floor?"

Mr. Rastall-Retford stooped and looked under the table.

"It is not on the floor," he said. "I suppose it must have been missing from the pack before I dealt."

Mrs. Rastall-Retford threw down her cards and rose ponderously. It offended her vaguely that there seemed to be nobody to blame. "I shall go to bed," she said.

* * * * *

Peter stood before the fire and surveyed Eve as she sat on the sofa. They were alone in the room, Mr. Rastall-Retford having drifted silently away in the wake of his mother. Suddenly Eve began to laugh helplessly.

He shook his head at her.

"This is considerably sharper than a serpent's tooth," he said. "You should be fawning gratefully upon me, not laughing. Do you suppose King Charles laughed at my ancestor when he ate the despatches? However, for the first time since I have been in this house I feel as if I had had a square meal."

Eve became suddenly serious. The smile left her face.

"Mr. Rayner, please don't think I'm ungrateful. I couldn't help laughing, but I can't tell you how grateful I am. You don't know what it would have been like if she had found out that I had revoked. I did it once before, and she kept on about it for days and days. It was awful." She shivered. "I think you must be right, and my nerves are going."

He nodded.

"So are you--to-morrow, by the first train. I wonder how soon we can get married. Do you know anything about special licenses?"

She looked at him curiously.

"You're very obstinate," she said.

"Firm," he corrected. "Firm. Could you pack to-night, do you think, and be ready for that ten-fifty to-morrow morning?"

She began to trace an intricate pattern on the floor with the point of her shoe.

"I can't imagine why you are fond of me!" she said. "I've been very horrid to you."

"Nonsense. You've been all that's sweet and womanly."

"And I want to tell you why," she went on. "Your--your sister----"

"Ah, I thought as much!"

"She--she saw that you seemed to be getting fond of me, and she----"

"She would!"

"Said some rather horrid things that--hurt," said Eve, in a low voice.

Peter crossed over to where she sat and took her hand.

"Don't you worry about her," he said. "She's not a bad sort really, but about once every six months she needs a brotherly talking-to, or she gets above herself. One is about due during the next few days."

He stroke her hand.

"Fasting," he said, thoughtfully, "clears and stimulates the brain. I fancy I shall be able to think out some rather special things to say to her this time."

CHEERFUL--BY REQUEST, by Edna Ferber
from Cheerful, By Request
Ebook #11395

The editor paid for the lunch (as editors do). He lighted his seventh cigarette and leaned back. The conversation, which had zigzagged from the war to Zuloaga, and from Rasputin the Monk to the number of miles a Darrow would go on a gallon, narrowed down to the thin, straight line of business.

"Now don't misunderstand. Please! We're not presuming to dictate. Dear me, no! We have always felt that the writer should be free to express that which is in his--ah--heart. But in the last year we've been swamped with these drab, realistic stories. Strong, relentless things, you know, about dishwashers, with a lot of fine detail about the fuzz of grease on the rim of the pan. And then those drear and hopeless ones about fallen sisters who end it all in the East River. The East River must be choked up with 'em. Now, I know that life is real, life is earnest, and I'm not demanding a happy ending, exactly. But if you could--that is--would you--do you see your way at all clear to giving us a fairly cheerful story? Not necessarily Glad, but not so darned Russian, if you get me. Not pink, but not all grey either. Say--mauve." ...

That was Josie Fifer's existence. Mostly grey, with a dash of pink. Which makes mauve.

Unless you are connected (which you probably are not) with the great firm of Hahn & Lohman, theatrical producers, you never will have heard of Josie Fifer.

There are things about the theatre that the public does not know. A statement, at first blush, to be disputed. The press agent, the special writer, the critic, the magazines, the Sunday supplement, the divorce courts--what have they left untold? We know the make of car Miss Billboard drives; who her husbands are and were; how much the movies have offered her; what she wears, reads, says, thinks, and eats for breakfast. Snapshots of author writing play at place on Hudson; pictures of the play in rehearsal; of the director directing it; of the stage

hands rewriting it--long before the opening night we know more about the piece than does the playwright himself, and are ten times less eager to see it.

Josie Fifer's knowledge surpassed even this. For she was keeper of the ghosts of the firm of Hahn & Lohman. Not only was she present at the birth of a play; she officiated at its funeral. She carried the keys to the closets that housed the skeletons of the firm. When a play died of inanition, old age, or--as was sometimes the case--before it was born, it was Josie Fifer who laid out its remains and followed it to the grave.

Her notification of its demise would come thus:

"Hello, Fifer! This is McCabe" (the property man of H. & L. at the phone).

"Well?"

"A little waspish this morning, aren't you, Josephine?"

"I've got twenty-five bathing suits for the No. 2 'Ataboy' company to mend and clean and press before five this afternoon. If you think I'm going to stand here wasting my--"

"All right, all right! I just wanted to tell you that 'My Mistake' closes Saturday. The stuff'll be up Monday morning early."

A sardonic laugh from Josie. "And yet they say 'What's in a name!'"

The unfortunate play had been all that its title implies. Its purpose was to star an actress who hadn't a glint. Her second-act costume alone had cost \$700, but even Russian sable bands can't carry a bad play. The critics had pounced on it with the savagery of their kind and hacked it, limb from limb, leaving its carcass to rot under the pitiless white glare of Broadway. The dress with the Russian sable bands went the way of all Hahn & Lohman tragedies. Josie Fifer received it, if not reverently, still appreciatively.

"I should think Sid Hahn would know by this time," she observed sniffily, as her expert fingers shook out the silken folds and smoothed the fabulous fur, "that auburn hair and a gurgle and a Lucille dress don't make a play. Besides, Fritz Kirke wears the biggest shoe of any actress I ever saw. A woman with feet like that"--she picked up a satin slipper, size 7-1/2 C--"hasn't any business on the stage. She ought to travel with a circus. Here, Etta. Hang this away in D, next to the amethyst blue velvet, and be sure and lock the door."

McCabe had been right. A waspish wit was Josie's.

The question is whether to reveal to you now where it was that Josie Fifer reigned thus, queen of the cast-offs; or to take you back to the days that led up to her being there--the days when she was José Fyfer on the programme.

Her domain was the storage warehouse of Hahn & Lohman, as you may have guessed. If your business lay Forty-third Street way, you might have passed the building a hundred times without once giving it a seeing glance. It was not Forty-third Street of the small shops, the smart crowds, and the glittering motors. It was the Forty-third lying east of the Grand Central sluice gates; east of fashion; east, in a word, of Fifth Avenue--a great square brick building smoke-grimed, cobwebbed, and having the look of a cold-storage plant or a car barn fallen into disuse; dusty, neglected, almost eerie. Yet within it lurks Romance, and her sombre sister Tragedy, and their antic brother Comedy, the cut-up.

A worn flight of wooden steps leads up from the sidewalk to the dim hallway; a musty-smelling passage wherein you are met by a genial sign which reads:

"No admittance. Keep out. This means you."

To confirm this, the eye, penetrating the gloom, is confronted by a great blank metal door that sheathes the elevator. To ride in that elevator is to know adventure, so painfully, so protestingly, with such creaks and jerks and lurchings does it pull itself from floor to floor,

like an octogenarian who, grunting and groaning, hoists himself from his easy-chair by slow stages that wring a protest from ankle, knee, hip, back and shoulder. The corkscrew stairway, broken and footworn though it is, seems infinitely less perilous.

First floor--second--third--fourth. Whew! And there you are in Josie Fifer's kingdom--a great front room, unexpectedly bright and even cosy with its whirl of sewing machines: tables, and tables, and tables, piled with orderly stacks of every sort of clothing, from shoes to hats, from gloves to parasols; and in the room beyond this, and beyond that, and again beyond that, row after row of high wooden cabinets stretching the width of the room, and forming innumerable aisles. All of Bluebeard's wives could have been tucked away in one corner of the remotest and least of these, and no one the wiser. All grimly shut and locked, they are, with the key in Josie's pocket. But when, at the behest of McCabe, or sometimes even Sid Hahn himself, she unlocked and opened one of these doors, what treasures hung revealed! What shimmer and sparkle and perfume--and moth balls! The long-tailed electric light bulb held high in one hand, Josie would stand at the door like a priestess before her altar.

There they swung, the ghosts and the skeletons, side by side. You remember that slinking black satin snakelike sheath that Gita Morini wore in "Little Eyolf"? There it dangles, limp, invertebrate, yet how eloquent! No other woman in the world could have worn that gown, with its unbroken line from throat to hem, its smooth, high, black satin collar, its writhing tail that went slip-slip-slipping after her. In it she had looked like a sleek and wicked python that had fasted for a long, long time.

Dresses there are that have made stage history. Surely you remember the beruffled, rose-strewn confection in which the beautiful Elsa Marriott swam into our ken in "Mississipp"? She used to say, wistfully, that she always got a hand on her entrance in that dress. It was due to the sheer shock of delight that thrilled audience after audience as it beheld her loveliness enhanced by this floating, diaphanous tulle cloud. There it hangs, time-yellowed, its pristine freshness vanished quite, yet as fragrant with romance as is the sere and withered blossom of a dead

white rose pressed within the leaves of a book of love poems. Just next it, incongruously enough, flaunt the wicked froufrou skirts and the low-cut bodice and the wasp waist of the abbreviated costume in which Cora Kassell used so generously to display her charms. A rich and portly society matron of Pittsburgh now--she whose name had been a synonym for pulchritude these thirty years; she who had had more cold creams, hats, cigars, corsets, horses, and lotions named for her than any woman in history! Her ample girth would have wrought sad havoc with that eighteen-inch waist now. Gone are the chaste curves of the slim white silk legs that used to kick so lithely from the swirl of lace and chiffon. Yet there it hangs, pertly pathetic, mute evidence of her vanished youth, her delectable beauty, and her unblushing confidence in those same.

Up one aisle and down the next--velvet, satin, lace and broadcloth--here the costume the great Canfield had worn in Richard III; there the little cocked hat and the slashed jerkin in which Maude Hammond, as Peterkins, winged her way to fame up through the hearts of a million children whose ages ranged from seven to seventy. Brocades and gingham; tailor suits and peignoirs; puffed sleeves and tight--dramatic history, all, they spelled failure, success, hope, despair, vanity, pride, triumph, decay. Tragic ghosts, over which Josie Fifer held grim sway!

Have I told you that Josie Fifer, moving nimbly about the great storehouse, limped as she went? The left leg swung as a normal leg should. The right followed haltingly, sagging at hip and knee. And that brings us back to the reason for her being where she was. And what.

The story of how Josie Fifer came to be mistress of the cast-off robes of the firm of Hahn & Lohman is one of those stage tragedies that never have a public performance. Josie had been one of those little girls who speak pieces at chicken-pie suppers held in the basement of the Presbyterian church. Her mother had been a silly, idle woman addicted to mother hubbards and paper-backed novels about the house. Her one passion was the theatre, a passion that had very scant opportunity for feeding in Wapello, Iowa. Josie's piece-speaking talent was evidently a direct inheritance. Some might call it a taint.

Two days before one of Josie's public appearances her mother would twist the child's hair into innumerable rag curlers that stood out in grotesque, Topsy-like bumps all over her fair head. On the eventful evening each rag chrysalis would burst into a full-blown butterfly curl. In a pale-blue, lace-fretted dress over a pale-blue slip, made in what her mother called "Empire style," Josie would deliver herself of "Entertaining Big Sister's Beau" and other sophisticated classics with an incredible ease and absence of embarrassment. It wasn't a definite boldness in her. She merely liked standing there before all those people, in her blue dress and her toe slippers, speaking her pieces with enhancing gestures taught her by her mother in innumerable rehearsals.

Any one who has ever lived in Wapello, Iowa, or its equivalent, remembers the old opera house on the corner of Main and Elm, with Schroeder's drug store occupying the first floor. Opera never came within three hundred miles of Wapello, unless it was the so-called comic kind. It was before the day of the ubiquitous moving-picture theatre that has since been the undoing of the one-night stand and the ten-twenty-thirty stock company. The old red-brick opera house furnished unlimited thrills for Josie and her mother. From the time Josie was seven she was taken to see whatever Wapello was offered in the way of the drama. That consisted mostly of plays of the tell-me-more-about-me-mother type.

By the time she was ten she knew the whole repertoire of the Maude La Vergne Stock Company by heart. She was *_blasé_* with "East Lynne" and "The Two Orphans," and even "Camille" left her cold. She was as wise to the trade tricks as is a New York first nighter. She would sit there in the darkened auditorium of a Saturday afternoon, surveying the stage with a judicious and undeceived eye, as she sucked indefatigably at a lollipop extracted from the sticky bag clutched in one moist palm. (A bag of candy to each and every girl; a ball or a top to each and every boy!) Josie knew that the middle-aged *_soubrette_* who came out between the first and second acts to sing a gingham-and-sunbonnet song would whisk off to reappear immediately in knee-length pink satin and curls. When the heroine left home in a shawl and a sudden snowstorm that followed her upstage and stopped when she went off, Josie was interested, but undeceived. She knew that the surprised-looking white

horse used in the Civil War comedy-drama entitled "His Southern Sweetheart" came from Joe Brink's livery stable in exchange for four passes, and that the faithful old negro servitor in the white cotton wig would save somebody from something before the afternoon was over.

It was inevitable that as Josie grew older she should take part in home-talent plays. It was one of these tinsel affairs that had made clear to her just where her future lay. The Wapello _Daily Courier_ helped her in her decision. She had taken the part of a gipsy queen, appropriately costumed in slightly soiled white satin slippers with four-inch heels, and a white satin dress enhanced by a red sash, a black velvet bolero, and large hoop earrings. She had danced and sung with a pert confidence, and the _Courier_ had pronounced her talents not amateur, but professional, and had advised the managers (who, no doubt, read the Wapello _Courier_ daily, along with their _Morning Telegraph_) to seek her out, and speedily.

Josie didn't wait for them to take the hint. She sought them out instead. There followed seven tawdry, hard-working, heartbreaking years. Supe, walk-on, stock, musical comedy--Josie went through them all. If any illusions about the stage had survived her Wapello days, they would have vanished in the first six months of her dramatic career. By the time she was twenty-four she had acquired the wisdom of fifty, a near-seal coat, a turquoise ring with a number of smoky-looking crushed diamonds surrounding it, and a reputation for wit and for decency. The last had cost the most.

During all these years of cheap theatrical boarding houses (the most soul-searing cheapness in the world), of one-night stands, of insult, disappointment, rebuff, and something that often came perilously near to want, Josie Fifer managed to retain a certain humorous outlook on life. There was something whimsical about it. She could even see a joke on herself. When she first signed her name José Fyfer, for example, she did it with, an appreciative giggle and a glint in her eye as she formed the accent mark over the e.

"They'll never stop me now," she said. "I'm made. But I wish I knew if that J was pronounced like H, in humbug. Are there any Spanish blondes?"

It used to be the habit of the other women in the company to say to her: "Jo, I'm blue as the devil to-day. Come on, give us a laugh."

She always obliged.

And then came a Sunday afternoon in late August when her laugh broke off short in the middle, and was forever after a stunted thing.

She was playing Atlantic City in a second-rate musical show. She had never seen the ocean before, and she viewed it now with an appreciation that still had in it something of a Wapello freshness.

They all planned to go in bathing that hot August afternoon after rehearsal. Josie had seen pictures of the beauteous bathing girl dashing into the foaming breakers. She ran across the stretch of glistening beach, paused and struck a pose, one toe pointed waterward, her arms extended affectedly.

"So!" she said mincingly. "So this is Paris!"

It was a new line in those days, and they all laughed, as she had meant they should. So she leaped into the water with bounds and shouts and much waving of white arms. A great floating derelict of a log struck her leg with its full weight, and with all the tremendous force of the breaker behind it. She doubled up ridiculously, and went down like a shot. Those on the beach laughed again. When she came up, and they saw her distorted face they stopped laughing, and fished her out. Her leg was broken in two places, and mashed in a dozen.

José Fyfer's dramatic career was over. (This is not the cheery portion of the story.)

When she came out of the hospital, three months later, she did very well indeed with her crutches. But the merry-eyed woman had vanished--she of the Wapello colouring that had persisted during all these years. In her place limped a wan, shrunken, tragic little figure whose humour had soured to a caustic wit. The near-seal coat and

the turquoise-and-crushed-diamond ring had vanished too.

During those agonized months she had received from the others in the company such kindness and generosity as only stage folk can show--flowers, candy, dainties, magazines, sent by every one from the prima donna to the call boy. Then the show left town. There came a few letters of kind inquiry, then an occasional post card, signed by half a dozen members of the company. Then these ceased. Josie Fifer, in her cast and splints and bandages and pain, dragged out long hospital days and interminable hospital nights. She took a dreary pleasure in following the tour of her erstwhile company via the pages of the theatrical magazines.

"They're playing Detroit this week," she would announce to the aloof and spectacled nurse. Or: "One-night stands, and they're due in Muncie, Ind., to-night. I don't know which is worse--playing Muncie for one night or this moan factory for a three month's run."

When she was able to crawl out as far as the long corridor she spoke to every one she met. As she grew stronger she visited here and there, and on the slightest provocation she would give a scene ranging all the way from "Romeo and Juliet" to "The Black Crook." It was thus she first met Sid Hahn, and felt the warming, healing glow of his friendship.

Some said that Sid Hahn's brilliant success as a manager at thirty-five was due to his ability to pick winners. Others thought it was his refusal to be discouraged when he found he had picked a failure. Still others, who knew him better, were likely to say: "Why, I don't know. It's a sort of--well, you might call it charm--and yet-- Did you ever see him smile? He's got a million-dollar grin. You can't resist it."

None of them was right. Or all of them. Sid Hahn, erstwhile usher, call boy, press agent, advance man, had a genius for things theatrical. It was inborn. Dramatic, sensitive, artistic, intuitive, he was often rendered inarticulate by the very force and variety of his feelings. A little, rotund, ugly man, Sid Hahn, with the eyes of a dreamer, the wide, mobile mouth of a humourist, the ears of a comic ol'-clo'es man. His generosity was proverbial, and it amounted to a vice.

In September he had come to Atlantic City to try out "Splendour." It was a doubtful play, by a new author, starring Sarah Haddon for the first time. No one dreamed the play would run for years, make a fortune for Hahn, lift Haddon from obscurity to the dizzy heights of stardom, and become a classic of the stage.

Ten minutes before the curtain went up on the opening performance Hahn was stricken with appendicitis. There was not even time to rush him to New York. He was on the operating table before the second act was begun. When he came out of the ether he said: "How did it go?"

"Fine!" beamed the nurse. "You'll be out in two weeks."

"Oh, hell! I don't mean the operation. I mean the play."

He learned soon enough from the glowing, starry-eyed Sarah Haddon and from every one connected with the play. He insisted on seeing them all daily, against his doctor's orders, and succeeded in working up a temperature that made his hospital stay a four weeks' affair. He refused to take the tryout results as final.

"Don't be too bubbly about this thing," he cautioned Sarah Haddon. "I've seen too many plays that were skyrockets on the road come down like sticks when they struck New York."

The company stayed over in Atlantic City for a week, and Hahn held scraps of rehearsals in his room when he had a temperature of 102. Sarah Haddon worked like a slave. She seemed to realise that her great opportunity had come--the opportunity for which hundreds of gifted actresses wait a lifetime. Haddon was just twenty-eight then--a year younger than Josie Fifer. She had not yet blossomed into the full radiance of her beauty. She was too slender, and inclined to stoop a bit, but her eyes were glorious, her skin petal-smooth, her whole face reminding one, somehow, of an intelligent flower. Her voice was a golden, liquid delight.

Josie Fifer, dragging herself from bed to chair, and from chair to bed,

used to watch for her. Hahn's room was on her floor. Sarah Haddon, in her youth and beauty and triumph, represented to Josie all that she had dreamed of and never realised; all that she had hoped for and never could know. She used to insist on having her door open, and she would lie there for hours, her eyes fixed on that spot in the hall across which Haddon would flash for one brief instant on her way to the room down the corridor. There is about a successful actress a certain radiant something--a glamour, a luxuriousness, an atmosphere that suggest a mysterious mixture of silken things, of perfume, of adulation, of all that is rare and costly and perishable and desirable.

Josie Fifer's stage experience had included none of this. But she knew they were there. She sensed that to this glorious artist would come all those fairy gifts that Josie Fifer would never possess. All things about her--her furs, her gloves, her walk, her hats, her voice, her very shoe ties--were just what Josie would have wished for. As she lay there she developed a certain grim philosophy.

"She's got everything a woman could wish for. Me, I haven't got a thing. Not a blamed thing! And yet they say everything works out in the end according to some scheme or other. Well, what's the answer to this, I wonder? I can't make it come out right. I guess one of the figures must have got away from me."

In the second week of Sid Hahn's convalescence he heard, somehow, of Josie Fifer. It was characteristic of him that he sent for her. She put a chiffon scarf about the neck of her skimpy little kimono, spent an hour and ten minutes on her hair, made up outrageously with that sublime unconsciousness that comes from too close familiarity with rouge pad and grease jar, and went. She was trembling as though facing a first-night audience in a part she wasn't up on. Between the crutches, the lameness, and the trembling she presented to Sid Hahn, as she stood in the doorway, a picture that stabbed his kindly, sensitive heart with a quick pang of sympathy.

He held out his hand. Josie's crept into it. At the feel of that generous friendly clasp she stopped trembling. Said Hahn:

"My nurse tells me that you can do a bedside burlesque of 'East Lynne' that made even that Boston-looking interne with the thick glasses laugh. Go on and do it for me, there's a good girl. I could use a laugh myself just now."

And Josie Fifer caught up a couch cover for a cloak, with the scarf that was about her neck for a veil, and, using Hahn himself as the ailing chee-ild, gave a biting burlesque of the famous bedside visit that brought the tears of laughter to his eyes, and the nurse flying from down the hall. "This won't do," said that austere person.

"Won't, eh? Go on and stick your old thermometer in my mouth. What do I care! A laugh like that is worth five degrees of temperature."

When Josie rose to leave he eyed her keenly, and pointed to the dragging leg.

"How about that? Temporary or permanent?"

"Permanent."

"Oh, fudge! Who's telling you that? These days they can do--"

"Not with this, though. That one bone was mashed into about twenty-nine splinters, and when it came to putting 'em together again a couple of pieces were missing. I must've mislaid 'em somewhere. Anyway, I make a limping exit--for life."

"Then no more stage for you--eh, my girl?"

"No more stage."

Hahn reached for a pad of paper on the table at his bedside, scrawled a few words on it, signed it "S.H." in the fashion which became famous, and held the paper out to her.

"When you get out of here," he said, "you come to New York, and up to my office; see? Give 'em this at the door. I've got a job for you--if you

want it."

And that was how Josie Fifer came to take charge of the great Hahn & Lohman storehouse. It was more than a storehouse. It was a museum. It housed the archives of the American stage. If Hahn & Lohman prided themselves on one thing more than on another, it was the lavish generosity with which they invested a play, from costumes to carpets. A period play was a period play when they presented it. You never saw a French clock on a Dutch mantel in a Hahn & Lohman production. No hybrid hangings marred their back drop. No matter what the play, the firm provided its furnishings from the star's slippers to the chandeliers. Did a play last a year or a week, at the end of its run furniture, hangings, scenery, rugs, gowns, everything, went off in wagonloads to the already crowded storehouse on East Forty-third Street.

Sometimes a play proved so popular that its original costumes, outworn, had to be renewed. Sometimes the public cried "Thumbs down!" at the opening performance, and would have none of it thereafter. That meant that costumes sometimes reached Josie Fifer while the wounds of the dressmaker's needle still bled in them. And whether for a week or a year fur on a Hahn & Lohman costume was real fur; its satin was silk-backed, its lace real lace. No paste, or tinsel, or cardboard about H. & L.! Josie Fifer could recall the scenes in a play, step by step from noting with her keen eye the marks left on costume after costume by the ravages of emotion. At the end of a play's run she would hold up a dress for critical inspection, turning it this way and that.

"This is the dress she wore in her big scene at the end of the second act where she crawls on her knees to her wronged husband and pounds on the door and weeps. She certainly did give it some hard wear. When Marriott crawls she crawls, and when she bawls she bawls. I'll say that for her. From the looks of this front breadth she must have worn a groove in the stage at the York."

No gently sentimental reason caused Hahn & Lohman to house these hundreds of costumes, these tons of scenery, these forests of furniture. Neither had Josie Fifer been hired to walk wistfully among them like a spinster wandering in a dead rose garden. No, they were stored for a

much thriftier reason. They were stored, if you must know, for possible future use. H. & L. were too clever not to use a last year's costume for a this year's road show. They knew what a coat of enamel would do for a bedroom set. It was Josie Fifer's duty not only to tabulate and care for these relics, but to refurbish them when necessary. The sewing was done by a little corps of assistants under Josie's direction.

But all this came with the years. When Josie Fifer, white and weak, first took charge of the H. & L. *_lares et penates_*, she told herself it was only for a few months--a year or two at most. The end of sixteen years found her still there.

When she came to New York, "Splendour" was just beginning its phenomenal three years' run. The city was mad about the play. People came to see it again and again--a sure sign of a long run. The Sarah Haddon second-act costume was photographed, copied (unsuccessfully), talked about, until it became as familiar as a uniform. That costume had much to do with the play's success, though Sarah Haddon would never admit it. "Splendour" was what is known as a period play. The famous dress was of black velvet, made with a quaint, full-gathered skirt that made Haddon's slim waist seem fairylike and exquisitely supple. The black velvet bodice outlined the delicate swell of the bust. A rope of pearls enhanced the whiteness of her throat. Her hair, done in old-time scallops about her forehead, was a gleaming marvel of simplicity, and the despair of every woman who tried to copy it. The part was that of an Italian opera singer. The play pulsed with romance and love, glamour and tragedy. Sarah Haddon, in her flowing black velvet robe and her pearls and her pallor, was an exotic, throbbing, exquisite realisation of what every woman in the audience dreamed of being and every man dreamed of loving.

Josie Fifer saw the play for the first time from a balcony seat given her by Sid Hahn. It left her trembling, red-eyed, shaken. After that she used to see it, by hook or crook whenever possible. She used to come in at the stage door and lurk back of the scenes and in the wings when she had no business there. She invented absurd errands to take her to the theatre where "Splendour" was playing. Sid Hahn always said that after the big third-act scene he liked to watch the audience swim up the

aisle. Josie, hidden in the back-stage shadows, used to watch, fascinated, breathless. Then, one night, she indiscreetly was led, by her, absorbed interest, to venture too far into the wings. It was during the scene where Haddon, hearing a broken-down street singer cracking the golden notes of "Aïda" into a thousand mutilated fragments, throws open her window and, leaning far out, pours a shower of Italian and broken English and laughter and silver coin upon her amazed compatriot below.

When the curtain went down she came off raging.

"What was that? Who was that standing in the wings? How dare any one stand there! Everybody knows I can't have any one in the wings. Staring! It ruined my scene to-night. Where's McCabe? Tell Mr. Hahn I want to see him. Who was it? Staring at me like a ghost!"

Josie had crept away, terrified, contrite, and yet resentful. But the next week saw her back at the theatre, though she took care to stay in the shadows.

She was waiting for the black velvet dress. It was more than a dress to her. It was infinitely more than a stage costume. It was the habit of glory. It epitomised all that Josie Fifer had missed of beauty and homage and success.

The play ran on, and on, and on. Sarah Haddon was superstitious about the black gown. She refused to give it up for a new one. She insisted that if ever she discarded the old black velvet for a new the run of the play would stop. She assured Hahn that its shabbiness did not show from the front. She clung to it with that childish unreasonableness that is so often found in people of the stage.

But Josie waited patiently. Dozens of costumes passed through her hands. She saw plays come and go. Dresses came to her whose lining bore the mark of world-famous modistes. She hung them away, or refurbished them if necessary with disinterested conscientiousness. Sometimes her caustic comment, as she did so, would have startled the complacency of the erstwhile wearers of the garments. Her knowledge of the stage, its

artifices, its pretence, its narrowness, its shams, was widening and deepening. No critic in bone-rimmed glasses and evening clothes was more scathingly severe than she. She sewed on satin. She mended fine lace. She polished stage jewels. And waited. She knew that one day her patience would be rewarded. And then, at last came the familiar voice over the phone: "Hello, Fifer! McCabe talking."

"Well?"

"'Splendour' closes Saturday. Haddon says she won't play in this heat. They're taking it to London in the autumn. The stuff'll be up Monday, early."

Josie Fifer turned away from the telephone with a face so radiant that one of her sewing women, looking up, was moved to comment.

"Got some good news, Miss Fifer?"

"'Splendour' closes this week."

"Well, my land! To look at you a person would think you'd been losing money at the box office every night it ran."

The look was still on her face when Monday morning came. She was sewing on a dress just discarded by Adelaide French, the tragédienne. Adelaide's maid was said to be the hardest-worked woman in the profession. When French finished with a costume it was useless as a dress; but it was something historic, like a torn and tattered battle flag--an emblem.

McCabe, box under his arm, stood in the doorway. Josie Fifer stood up so suddenly that the dress on her lap fell to the floor. She stepped over it heedlessly, and went toward McCabe, her eyes on the pasteboard box. Behind McCabe stood two more men, likewise box-laden.

"Put them down here," said Josie. The men thumped the boxes down on the long table. Josie's fingers were already at the strings. She opened the first box, emptied its contents, tossed them aside, passed on to the

second. Her hands busied themselves among the silks and broadcloth of this; then on to the third and last box. McCabe and his men, with scenery and furniture still to unload and store, turned to go. Their footsteps echoed hollowly as they clattered down the worn old stairway. Josie snapped the cord that bound the third box. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright. She turned it upside down. Then she pawed it over. Then she went back to the contents of the first two boxes, clawing about among the limp garments with which the table was strewn. She was breathing quickly. Suddenly: "It isn't here!" she cried. "It isn't here!" She turned and flew to the stairway. The voices of the men came up to her. She leaned far over the railing. "McCabe! McCabe!"

"Yeh? What do you want?"

"The black velvet dress! The black velvet dress! It isn't there."

"Oh, yeh. That's all right. Haddon, she's got a bug about that dress, and she says she wants to take it to London with her, to use on the opening night. She says if she wears a new one that first night, the play'll be a failure. Some temperament, that girl, since she's got to be a star!"

Josie stood clutching the railing of the stairway. Her disappointment was so bitter that she could not weep. She felt cheated, outraged. She was frightened at the intensity of her own sensations. "She might have let me have it," she said aloud in the dim half light of the hallway. "She's got everything else in the world. She might have let me have that."

Then she went back into the big, bright sewing room. "Splendour" ran three years in London.

During those three years she saw Sid Hahn only three or four times. He spent much of his time abroad. Whenever opportunity presented itself she would say: "Is 'Splendour' still playing in London?"

"Still playing."

The last time Hahn, intuitive as always, had eyed her curiously. "You seem to be interested in that play."

"Oh, well," Josie had replied with assumed carelessness, "it being in Atlantic City just when I had my accident, and then meeting you through that, and all, why, I always kind of felt a personal interest in it." ...

At the end of three years Sarah Haddon returned to New York with an English accent, a slight embonpoint, and a little foreign habit of rushing up to her men friends with a delighted exclamation (preferably French) and kissing them on both cheeks. When Josie Fifer, happening back stage at a rehearsal of the star's new play, first saw her do this a grim gleam came into her eyes.

"Bernhardt's the only woman who can spring that and get away with it," she said to her assistant. "Haddon's got herself sized up wrong. I'll gamble her next play will be a failure."

And it was.

The scenery, props, and costumes of the London production of "Splendour" were slow in coming back. But finally they did come. Josie received them with the calmness that comes of hope deferred. It had been three years since she last saw the play. She told herself, chidingly, that she had been sort of foolish over that play and this costume. Her recent glimpse of Haddon had been somewhat disillusioning. But now, when she finally held the gown itself in her hand--the original "Splendour" second-act gown, a limp, soft black mass: just a few yards of worn and shabby velvet--she found her hands shaking. Here was where she had hugged the toy dog to her breast. Here where she had fallen on her knees to pray before the little shrine in her hotel room. Every worn spot had a meaning for her. Every mark told a story. Her fingers smoothed it tenderly.

"Not much left of that," said one of the sewing girls, glancing up. "I guess Sarah would have a hard time making the hooks and eyes meet now. They say she's come home from London looking a little too prosperous."

Josie did not answer. She folded the dress over her arm and carried it to the wardrobe room. There she hung it away in an empty closet, quite apart from the other historic treasures. And there it hung, untouched, until the following Sunday.

On Sunday morning East Forty-third Street bears no more resemblance to the week-day Forty-third than does a stiffly starched and subdued Sabbath-school scholar to his Monday morning self. Strangely quiet it is, and unfrequented. Josie Fifer, scurrying along in the unwonted stillness, was prompted to throw a furtive glance over her shoulder now and then, as though afraid of being caught at some criminal act. She ran up the little flight of steps with a rush, unlocked the door with trembling fingers, and let herself into the cool, dank gloom of the storehouse hall. The metal door of the elevator stared inquiringly after her. She fled past it to the stairway. Every step of that ancient structure squeaked and groaned. First floor, second, third, fourth. The everyday hum of the sewing machines was absent. The room seemed to be holding its breath. Josie fancied that the very garments on the worktables lifted themselves inquiringly from their supine position to see what it was that disturbed their Sabbath rest. Josie, a tense, wide-eyed, frightened little figure, stood in the centre of the vast room, listening to she knew not what. Then, relaxing, she gave a nervous little laugh and, reaching up, unpinned her hat. She threw it on a near-by table and disappeared into the wardrobe room beyond.

Minutes passed--an hour. She did not come back. From the room beyond came strange sounds--a woman's voice; the thrill of a song; cries; the anguish of tears; laughter, harsh and high, as a desperate and deceived woman laughs--all this following in such rapid succession that Sid Hahn, puffing laboriously up the four flights of stairs leading to the wardrobe floor, entered the main room unheard. Unknown to any one, he was indulging in one of his unsuspected visits to the old wareroom that housed the evidence of past and gone successes--successes that had brought him fortune and fame, but little real happiness, perhaps. No one knew that he loved to browse among these pathetic rags of a forgotten triumph. No one would have dreamed that this chubby little man could glow and weep over the cast-off garment of a famous Cyrano, or the faded finery of a Zaza.

At the doorway he paused now, startled. He was listening with every nerve of his taut body. What? Who? He tiptoed across the room with a step incredibly light for one so stout, peered cautiously around the side of the doorway, and leaned up against it weakly. Josie Fifer, in the black velvet and mock pearls of "Splendour," with her grey-streaked blonde hair hidden under the romantic scallops of a black wig, was giving the big scene from the third act. And though it sounded like a burlesque of that famous passage, and though she limped more than ever as she reeled to an imaginary shrine in the corner, and though the black wig was slightly askew by now, and the black velvet hung with bunchy awkwardness about her skinny little body, there was nothing of mirth in Sid Hahn's face as he gazed. He shrank back now.

She was coming to the big speech at the close of the act--the big renunciation speech that was the curtain. Sid Hahn turned and tiptoed painfully, breathlessly, magnificently, out of the big front room, into the hallway, down the creaking stairs, and so to the sunshine of Forty-third Street, with its unaccustomed Sunday-morning quiet. And he was smiling that rare and melting smile of his--the smile that was said to make him look something like a kewpie, and something like a cupid, and a bit like an imp, and very much like an angel. There was little of the first three in it now, and very much of the last. And so he got heavily into his very grand motor car and drove off.

"Why, the poor little kid," said he--"the poor, lonely, stifled little crippled-up kid."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" inquired his chauffeur.

"Speak when you're spoken to," snapped Sid Hahn.

And here it must be revealed to you that Sid Hahn did not marry the Cinderella of the storage warehouse. He did not marry anybody, and neither did Josie. And yet there is a bit more to this story--ten years more, if you must know--ten years, the end of which found Josie a sparse, spectacled, and agile little cripple, as alert and caustic as ever. It found Sid Hahn the most famous theatrical man of his day. It

found Sarah Haddon at the fag-end of a career that had blazed with triumph and adulation. She had never had a success like "Splendour." Indeed, there were those who said that all the plays that followed had been failures, carried to semi-success on the strength of that play's glorious past. She eschewed low-cut gowns now. She knew that it is the telltale throat which first shows the marks of age. She knew, too, why Bernhardt, in "Camille," always died in a high-necked nightgown. She took to wearing high, ruffled things about her throat, and softening, kindly chiffons.

And then, in a mistaken moment, they planned a revival of "Splendour." Sarah Haddon would again play the part that had become a classic. Fathers had told their children of it--of her beauty, her golden voice, the exquisite grace of her, the charm, the tenderness, the pathos. And they told them of the famous black velvet dress, and how in it she had moved like a splendid, buoyant bird.

So they revived "Splendour." And men and women brought their sons and daughters to see. And what they saw was a stout, middle-aged woman in a too-tight black velvet dress that made her look like a dowager. And when this woman flopped down on her knees in the big scene at the close of the last act she had a rather dreadful time of it getting up again. And the audience, resentful, bewildered, cheated of a precious memory, laughed. That laugh sealed the career of Sarah Haddon. It is a fickle thing, this public that wants to be amused; fickle and cruel and--paradoxically enough--true to its superstitions. The Sarah Haddon of eighteen years ago was one of these. They would have none of this fat, puffy, ample-bosomed woman who was trying to blot her picture from their memory. "Away with her!" cried the critics through the columns of next morning's paper. And Sarah Haddon's day was done.

"It's because I didn't wear the original black velvet dress!" cried she, with the unreasoning rage for which she had always been famous. "If I had worn it, everything would have been different. That dress had a good-luck charm. Where is it? I want it. I don't care if they do take off the play. I want it. I want it."

"Why, child," Sid Hahn said soothingly, "that dress has probably fallen

into dust by this time."

"Dust! What do you mean? How old do you think I am? That you should say that to me! I've made millions for you, and now--"

"Now, now, Sally, be a good girl. That's all rot about that dress being lucky. You've grown out of this part; that's all. We'll find another play--"

"I want that dress."

Sid Hahn flushed uncomfortably. "Well, if you must know, I gave it away."

"To whom?"

"To--to Josie Fifer. She took a notion to it, and so I told her she could have it." Then, as Sarah Haddon rose, dried her eyes, and began to straighten her hat: "Where are you going?" He trailed her to the door worriedly. "Now, Sally, don't do anything foolish. You're just tired and overstrung. Where are you--"

"I am going to see Josie Fifer."

"Now, look here, Sarah!"

But she was off, and Sid Hahn could only follow after, the showman in him anticipating the scene that was to follow. When he reached the fourth floor of the storehouse Sarah Haddon was there ahead of him. The two women--one tall, imperious, magnificent in furs; the other shrunken, deformed, shabby--stood staring at each other from opposites sides of the worktable. And between them, in a crumpled, grey-black heap, lay the velvet gown.

"I don't care who says you can have it," Josie Fifer's shrill voice was saying. "It's mine, and I'm going to keep it. Mr. Hahn himself gave it to me. He said I could cut it up for a dress or something if I wanted to. Long ago." Then, as Sid Hahn himself appeared, she appealed to him.

"There he is now. Didn't you, Mr. Hahn? Didn't you say I could have it? Years ago?"

"Yes, Jo," said Sid Hahn. "It's yours, to do with as you wish."

Sarah Haddon, who never had been denied anything in all her pampered life, turned to him now. Her bosom rose and fell. She was breathing sharply. "But S.H.!" she cried, "S.H., I've got to have it. Don't you see, I want it! It's all I've got left in the world of what I used to be. I want it!" She began to cry, and it was not acting.

Josie Fifer stood staring at her, her eyes wide with horror and unbelief.

"Why, say, listen! Listen! You can have it. I didn't know you wanted it as bad as that. Why, you can have it. I want you to take it. Here."

She shoved it across the table. Sarah reached out for it quickly. She rolled it up in a tight bundle and whisked off with it without a backward glance at Josie or at Hahn. She was still sobbing as she went down the stairs.

The two stood staring at each other ludicrously. Hahn spoke first.

"I'm sorry, Josie. That was nice of you, giving it to her like that."

But Josie did not seem to hear. At least she paid no attention to his remark. She was staring at him with that dazed and wide-eyed look of one upon whom a great truth has just dawned. Then, suddenly, she began to laugh. She laughed a high, shrill laugh that was not so much an expression of mirth as of relief.

Sid Hahn put up a pudgy hand in protest. "Josie! Please! For the love of Heaven don't you go and get it. I've had to do with one hysterical woman to-day. Stop that laughing! Stop it!"

Josie stopped, not abruptly, but in a little series of recurring giggles. Then these subsided and she was smiling. It wasn't at all her

usual smile. The bitterness was quite gone from it. She faced Sid Hahn across the table. Her palms were outspread, as one who would make things plain. "I wasn't hysterical. I was just laughing. I've been about seventeen years earning that laugh. Don't grudge it to me."

"Let's have the plot," said Hahn.

"There isn't any. You see, it's just--well, I've just discovered how it works out. After all these years! She's had everything she wanted all her life. And me, I've never had anything. Not a thing. She's travelled one way, and I've travelled in the opposite direction, and where has it brought us? Here we are, both fighting over an old black velvet rag. Don't you see? Both wanting the same--" She broke off, with the little twisted smile on her lips again. "Life's a strange thing, Mr. Hahn."

"I hope, Josie, you don't claim any originality for that remark," replied Sid Hahn dryly.

"But," argued the editor, "you don't call this a cheerful story, I hope."

"Well, perhaps not exactly boisterous. But it teaches a lesson, and all that. And it's sort of philosophical and everything, don't you think?"

The editor shuffled the sheets together decisively, so that they formed a neat sheaf. "I'm afraid I didn't make myself quite clear. It's entertaining, and all that, but--ah--in view of our present needs, I'm sorry to say we--"

A DARK HORSE by Will Lillibridge
from A Breath of Prairie and other stories
EBook #29245

Iowa City is not large, nor are the prospects for metropolitan greatness at all flattering. Even her most zealous citizen, the ancient of the market corner, admits that "there ain't been much stirrin' for quite a spell back," and among the broad fraternity of commercial travellers, the town is a standing joke. Yet, throughout the entire State, no community of equal size is so well known. It is the home of the State University.

In the year '90-something-or-other, there was enrolled in the junior class of the university, one Walter R. Chester, but it is doubtful whether five other students in the same classic seat of learning could have told you his given name. Away back in his freshman year he had been dubbed "Lord" Chester. And as "Lord" Chester alone is his name still preserved, and revered in university annals.

The reasons lying back of this exaltation to the peerage were not very complex, but quite as adequate as those usually inspiring college nicknames. He was known to be country-bred, and the average freshwater school defines the "country" as a region of dense mental darkness, commencing where the campus ends and extending thence in every direction, throughout the uncharted realms of space.

Each Friday afternoon, "Lord" Chester would carefully lock his room and disappear upon a bicycle; this much was plainly visible to everybody. On Monday he would reappear. The hiatus afforded a peg from which much unprofitable speculation was suspended. The argument most plausible was that he went home, while one romantic youth suggested a girl. The accusation was never repeated. What? The "Lord" a ladies' man? Tut! One would as soon expect a statue to drill a minstrel show.

Thus Chester's personal affairs remained a mystery. He never talked reflexively--rare attribute in a college man--and, moreover, curiosity never thrived well in his presence. It utterly failed to bear fruit.

Another peculiarity distinguished him from all the rest of the student body: he roomed by himself. Although invariably courteous and polite to visitors, he was never known to extend an invitation for a second visit. He quite obviously wanted to be left alone, and the "fellows" met him more than half-way.

But what, more than anything else, probably helped to designate him "Lord," was the scrupulous way in which he dressed. There was no hint of the pastoral in his sartorial accomplishments, and it was his one extravagance. Though from the country and therefore presumably poor, no swell son of the Western _haute monde_ made an equally smart appearance.

We have been viewing the youth from the standpoint of his fellow-students. As a matter of fact, they never saw the real man, the man behind the closed door, at all. He was a terrific worker. When he decided to do a thing, he did it. Night was as day at such times, and meals were unthought of. He literally plunged out of sight into his work, and as yet he had never failed.

One reason for this uniform success lay in the fact that he was able to define his limitations, and never attempted the impossible. He was, indeed, poor; that is, relatively so. His earliest recollections were associated with corn rows and grilling suns; which accounted for the present cheerfulness with which he tackled any task, and for his appetite for hard work. When tired, he would think of the weight of a hoe in a boy's hand at six o'clock in the afternoon, and proceed with renewed vigor.

Such was "Lord" Chester: product of work and solitude; a man who knew more about the ideal than the real; a man who would never forget a friend nor forgive an injury; who would fight to the bitter end and die game--hero of "the_" Marathon, whose exciting history is impossible to avoid in Iowa City.

By nature, Chester was an athlete, and by way of exercise he was accustomed to indulge in a few turns daily upon the cinder path. One evening in early spring he was jogging along at a steady brisk pace,

when two men in training-suits caught up with him. They were puffing when they fell in beside him. Presently they dropped behind, and one, a tall important youth, of the name of Richards, called out:

"I say, me lud, aren't you going to clear the trail?"

Quick as a shot Chester halted and faced around.

"What's that?" he asked quietly.

The other two nearly bumped into him, but managed to come to a standstill, before precipitating that catastrophe. They lurched back upon their heels, nearly toppling backwards, too surprised for the moment to speak. Chester did not stir.

"Jiminy crickets!" Richards' companion exclaimed in a moment. "You're deuced sudden, Chester, I must say."

And Richards' manner promptly grew conciliatory.

"Old man," he said, smiling, "you really ought to train. You've got form--by George, you have! Besides, you wouldn't have any opposition to speak of, you know."

Richards was still smiling; but a smile, however warmly encouraged from within, is apt to take cold in a frost. The casual glance with which Chester took in the young man, from his light sprinting-pumps to his eyes, may be accurately described as frigid. Not until he had held the other's embarrassed look for an appreciable pause did he deign to speak.

"There really ought to be," he said without emotion, "at least one man in the field. I think I shall train."

Thus it came about that "Lord" Chester decided to enter athletics. Five minutes previously even the thought had not occurred to him; but he wasn't the man to quail before a bluff.

The track management of this particular university was an oligarchy; was governed by a few absolute individuals. Perhaps such a condition is not as rare as might be supposed. However that may be, it was here a case of being either "in" or "out." Chester was unpopular, and from the first had been out.

There were only four entries for the running events, the same names appearing in all; so he could not be kept from the field. But he well knew that various ways existed by which favoritism could be shown, and that these preferences, too trifling in themselves to warrant complaint, might prove a serious handicap in a close contest. He knew that, however honors might lie among the other entries, they would hesitate at nothing to prevent him from taking a place. In fact, Richards openly boasted that he would pocket "his ludship" at the finish.

So Chester shaped his plans accordingly. He had never aimed at the impossible, nor did he now. He withdrew from all short-distance runs and yard dashes, and concentrated his mind upon the Marathon--thus dignified, although the faculty would permit nothing more arduous than two miles.

In saying trained, everything is meant that the word can be made to imply: the sort of hour in, hour out, to-the-limit-of-endurance training which either makes or kills. A fortnight before Field Day Chester was in perfect condition, and had his capabilities gauged to a nicety. He was now entered only in the Marathon; they virtually had forced him from the half-mile, and they should be made to pay the penalty.

One day before the race Chester went to the bank and inquired the amount of his balance. It was shown him: one hundred and six dollars and some odd cents. He drew a cheque for the amount, and thrust the bills into his pocket. From the bank he walked straight up Main Street for three blocks, then turned in at a well-kept brick house.

"Mr. Richards in?" he asked of the servant-girl.

"Yes, sir. Right upstairs--second door to the left. He's got company now."

The junior nevertheless resolutely mounted the stairs and knocked upon the door. The noise inside resembled a pocket-edition of the Chicago Board of Trade, so Chester hammered again, louder.

"Come!" some one yelled, and the noise subsided.

He opened the door and stepped inside. A half-dozen young fellows were scattered about, but as he knew none of them, except by name, he ignored their presence and walked directly up to Richards.

"I've come on business," he said; "can I speak with you a moment?"

"Sure!" Richards removed his feet from a chair, kicking it at the same time toward his visitor. "These fellows know more about my business now than I do myself, so get it off of your chest, Chester."

The company laughed, but Chester remained wholly unmoved.

"All right," said he, calmly. "You're in the Marathon: want to risk anything on it?"

Up went Richards' feet once more, this time to a table. He winked broadly at his friends, and replied with an air of vast carelessness,

"Why--yes; I don't mind. Guess I can cover you."

"How much?" demanded Chester. "Odds even, mind."

"I said I'd cover you, didn't I?" with some warmth. Richards fumbled in his trousers pockets, extracting therefrom a handful of loose change.

Chester advanced to the table. At sight of his roll of bills a sudden silence fell. All eyes were glued upon them while he counted.

"Five--ten--fifteen"--and so on, up to one hundred. He stowed the remaining five back in his pocket, pushed the pile into the middle of the table and looked coolly down at his host. Said he,

"One hundred, even, that I win the Marathon. Cover, or show these fellows the sort of piker you are."

And Richards came very near to showing them. His face was a study. He hadn't ten dollars to his name; he was painfully aware of the fact, and here were these six boys who would know it too in about two seconds. He was rattled, and sat looking at the pile of bills as though charmed. He racked his brain for some way out of the predicament, but the only thing he could think of was to wonder whether the portrait on the top note was that of Hendricks or Rufus Choate. "It can't be Choate," suddenly occurred to him. "But then it--"

There was a laugh in the back of the room. Richards stood up. A dozen fire alarms would not have recalled him so quickly. Whatever else might be said of the man he was game, and now his gameness showed.

"Give me an hour; I'll meet you then in front of the postoffice." While speaking he had gotten into his coat; now he walked toward the door. "Amuse yourselves while I'm gone, fellows," he said, and disappeared down the stairway.

Chester replaced the notes in his pocket, nodded gravely to the company and followed.

Not a boy spoke, but all sat staring blankly at the doorway.

An hour later, both Richards and Chester appeared at the postoffice. The former, by dint of much persistent circulation among his fellow athletes, had found enough of them who were willing to pool their funds in order to secure the necessary amount. The two young men had witnesses, the wager was properly closed and the money deposited. Neither spoke an unnecessary word during the meeting, but when Chester started to leave, Richards turned facetiously to his friends.

"'Is bloomin' ludship will start training Friday; bet he has his wheel in soak."

To which remark Chester paid not the slightest attention.

Whatever may be said to the contrary, six boys can no more retain a secret than can six girls, and inside of an hour the story of the big bet had spread over the town. In due course it penetrated to the city: one day a reporter appeared and interviewed the principals, and on the following Sunday their photographs adorned the pink section of a great daily. This was nuts for the university--but it is getting ahead of our own story somewhat.

Chester, naturally, was the centre of curiosity. He had not pawned his "bike," as was demonstrated when Friday rolled around; but had it been known that the last cent he owned in the world had been staked upon the issue, no doubt the interest would have been greater.

Field Day opened bright and clear, and early in the afternoon Athletic Park began to fill. A rumor had gone abroad that the two principal competitors had actually come to blows, and that each had sworn to die rather than lose the race. Long before the opening event the inclosure was crowded with spectators, all eagerly discussing the Marathon, to the exclusion of every other contest. The opinion was freely expressed that Richards would "put a crimp in that chesty Chester," and that he would "win in a walk." They made no bones about playing favorites.

It was a still, hot day, and if there is any advantage in atmospheric conditions each contestant should have been inspired with that absolute confidence of winning, without which the fastest race is but a tame affair. At two o'clock the band commenced playing. The judges tried to follow the programme, but the cries of "Marathon! Marathon!" grew so insistent and clamorous that they finally yielded, and the event was called.

Richards responded first. He was popular, and the grandstand gave him an ovation as he took his position under the wire. It seemed as though

the handkerchief of every girl present was in the air. The two figureheads, friends of Richards, came next, and last of all Chester.

A feeble attempt at applause marked his passage in front of the grandstand; but he never looked up, and for any indication he gave to the contrary, he might have been the only person on the grounds. His track suit was hidden by a long black door curtain, in lieu of a bath-robe, and a pretty girl on the front row remarked audibly, "He's all ready for the funeral."

"Sure thing," answered her companion. "He knows his obsequies are about to take place."

"Peels well," a man by the rail critically commented.

"But--rats!--Richards has pocketed this event ever since he's been here; you can't make the pace for him with anything slower than an auto."

The runners were in line at last, crouching low, tense, finger-tips upon the ground, the starting-pistol above their heads.

"Starters ready?" floated in a sing-song voice from the judges' stand. "Timers r-r-read-y-y?" A sharp crack from the pistol, and they were off.

Then a queer thing happened. Instead of dawdling along behind, as every one expected, Chester, without an instant's hesitation, pushed to the front and set the pace.

And what a pace! It was literally a race from the word go. Chester took the inside and faced the music, Richards and the others close in behind. Sympathy in the grandstand was beginning to turn; everybody appreciates pluck. The spectators, however, knew him to be a novice, and many supposed that he had lost his head; so when he passed the grandstand on the first lap, any amount of contradictory advice was shouted noisily.

"Let them set the pace!" "You're killing yourself!" "Oh, you bally

Lord!--go it, kid!" "Don't let 'em nose you out, Chester, old scout!" "Save your air, old top, you'll need it!" and much more of a like kind was hurled at him, which reached his ears through the veil of singing wind, like the roar of distant breakers upon the seashore.

He kept his own counsel. He had followed that pace every day during the last two weeks of his training, and he knew precisely what he could do. Besides the air was quiet, and the disadvantage of being pace-maker was not so great as people thought.

In this formation they came round the half-mile oval the second time, each man working with the nice regularity of well-oiled machinery. Not a sound now from the grandstand; only the soft pat of the runners' feet could be heard. The crowd had caught Chester's idea: but could he hold out?

They had passed the three-quarter pole on the third lap when a yell went up, and everybody rose excitedly to their feet. Space was growing rapidly between the leaders and those behind; it was now resolved to a duel between the principals.

As they dashed past, the crowd examined them closely, scores of field-glasses being trained upon them like so many guns.

Chester was still erect, his head well back, chest forward, arms working piston-like, close down at his sides, while his long, regular tread was as light and springy as an Indian's. His jaw was set grimly, but it was manifest that he was still breathing deep and regularly through his nostrils.

It was equally manifest that his opponent was in distress. The last of his strength and determination was dying away in a desperate effort to keep his pace; his face was colorless, eyes staring, his step irregular. Worst of all, his mouth was open, and his chest could be seen to vibrate as he panted.

[Illustration: He heard a voice ... and glanced back.]

"By Jove!" muttered the man at the rail, as amazed as though the blue canopy of heaven had suddenly fallen, "Chester'll take it, I do believe!" And the crowd was beginning to believe the same.

The rivals maintained their relative positions until, on the last lap, the three-quarter pole was once more reached. The two figureheads had dropped out and mounted a fence where they would not be too far away from the finish.

Every eye was trained upon the racers, the excitement was tense. Chester was pounding grimly away; sweat was pouring down his face until it glistened in the sun; his legs ached as though in a boot of torture. But he had no thought of allowing Richards to close the gap between them by an inch. He was counting the _pat-pat-pat!_ of his feet upon the track. "Seventy-three more, and it's won, old boy," he muttered. He could hear Richards' every breath. "One, two, three,--" he counted.

He heard a voice, so broken that the words could hardly be distinguished, and he glanced back.

"For God's--sake, Chester--hold--up!" gasped Richards. "I--can't lose--this race--now."

He was a pitiable figure, his white face drawn in lines of pain, his body swaying uncertainly, as he pressed despairingly on.

For one moment Chester's heart felt a throb of pity. Then he thought of his work in sun and rain; of Richards' contempt in the past; of the cheers for his rival and the open ridicule of his own pretensions; and last of all, but far from being the least consideration, the two hundred dollars absolutely necessary to carry him through his final year to graduation.

Ah, nobody knew about that two hundred dollars, save himself and one little girl, who had driven into town early in the afternoon, and who had slipped timidly into as good a seat as she could find in the stand. She showed one dot of pink among hundreds of fluffy white

gowns; Chester was ignorant of her presence, but as he sped round and round the track, her eyes never once left him, nor did she cease praying silently that he might win!

Only for an instant did he hesitate; then his face settled into an expression not pleasant to look upon. He forgot that he was tired, that a grandstand full of howling maniacs was ahead of him. He thought only of the girl in pink--and made his spurt.

Richards tried to follow, but a haze was forming over his eyes. His heart was pounding until he believed that he must suffocate. Then he reeled suddenly, lost his balance and fell into darkness.

"So this is victory!" murmured Chester to himself a moment later, as he swayed unsteadily upon the shoulders of a howling mob. He was thinking of poor Richards lying back there upon the track. But just then he espied the transfigured face of the girl in pink.

"It is! It is!" he shouted joyfully.

ERIC HERMANNSON'S SOUL by Willa Cather
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I.

It was a great night at the Lone Star schoolhouse--a night when the Spirit was present with power and when God was very near to man. So it seemed to Asa Skinner, servant of God and Free Gospeller. The schoolhouse was crowded with the saved and sanctified, robust men and women, trembling and quailing before the power of some mysterious psychic force. Here and there among this cowering, sweating multitude crouched some poor wretch who had felt the pangs of an awakened conscience, but had not yet experienced that complete divestment of reason, that frenzy born of a convulsion of the mind, which, in the parlance of the Free Gospellers, is termed "the Light." On the floor, before the mourners' bench, lay the unconscious figure of a man in whom outraged nature had sought her last resort. This "trance" state is the highest evidence of grace among the Free Gospellers, and indicates a close walking with God.

Before the desk stood Asa Skinner, shouting of the mercy and vengeance of God, and in his eyes shone a terrible earnestness, an almost prophetic flame. Asa was a converted train gambler who used to run between Omaha and Denver. He was a man made for the extremes of life; from the most debauched of men he had become the most ascetic. His was a bestial face, a face that bore the stamp of Nature's eternal injustice. The forehead was low, projecting over the eyes, and the sandy hair was plastered down over it and then brushed back at an abrupt right angle. The chin was heavy, the nostrils were low and wide, and the lower lip hung loosely except in his moments of spasmodic earnestness, when it shut like a steel trap. Yet about those coarse features there were deep, rugged furrows, the scars of many a hand-to-hand struggle with the weakness of the flesh, and about that drooping lip were sharp, strenuous lines that had conquered it and taught it to pray. Over those seamed cheeks there was a certain pallor, a grayness caught from many a vigil. It was as though, after Nature had done her worst with that face, some fine chisel had gone over it, chastening and almost

transfiguring it. To-night, as his muscles twitched with emotion, and the perspiration dropped from his hair and chin, there was a certain convincing power in the man. For Asa Skinner was a man possessed of a belief, of that sentiment of the sublime before which all inequalities are leveled, that transport of conviction which seems superior to all laws of condition, under which debauchees have become martyrs; which made a tinker an artist and a camel-driver the founder of an empire. This was with Asa Skinner to-night, as he stood proclaiming the vengeance of God.

It might have occurred to an impartial observer that Asa Skinner's God was indeed a vengeful God if he could reserve vengeance for those of his creatures who were packed into the Lone Star schoolhouse that night. Poor exiles of all nations; men from the south and the north, peasants from almost every country of Europe, most of them from the mountainous, night-bound coast of Norway. Honest men for the most part, but men with whom the world had dealt hardly; the failures of all countries, men sobered by toil and saddened by exile, who had been driven to fight for the dominion of an untoward soil, to sow where others should gather, the advance-guard of a mighty civilization to be.

Never had Asa Skinner spoken more earnestly than now. He felt that the Lord had this night a special work for him to do. To-night Eric Hermansson, the wildest lad on all the Divide, sat in his audience with a fiddle on his knee, just as he had dropped in on his way to play for some dance. The violin is an object of particular abhorrence to the Free Gospellers. Their antagonism to the church organ is bitter enough, but the fiddle they regard as a very incarnation of evil desires, singing forever of worldly pleasures and inseparably associated with all forbidden things.

Eric Hermansson had long been the object of the prayers of the revivalists. His mother had felt the power of the Spirit weeks ago, and special prayer-meetings had been held at her house for her son. But Eric had only gone his ways laughing, the ways of youth, which are short enough at best, and none too flowery on the Divide. He slipped away from the prayer-meetings to meet the Campbell boys in

Genereau's saloon, or hug the plump little French girls at Chevalier's dances, and sometimes, of a summer night, he even went across the dewy cornfields and through the wild-plum thicket to play the fiddle for Lena Hanson, whose name was a reproach through all the Divide country, where the women are usually too plain and too busy and too tired to depart from the ways of virtue. On such occasions Lena, attired in a pink wrapper and silk stockings and tiny pink slippers, would sing to him, accompanying herself on a battered guitar. It gave him a delicious sense of freedom and experience to be with a woman who, no matter how, had lived in big cities and knew the ways of town-folk, who had never worked in the fields and had kept her hands white and soft, her throat fair and tender, who had heard great singers in Denver and Salt Lake, and who knew the strange language of flattery and idleness and mirth.

Yet, careless as he seemed, the frantic prayers of his mother were not altogether without their effect upon Eric. For days he had been fleeing before them as a criminal from his pursuers, and over his pleasures had fallen the shadow of something dark and terrible that dogged his steps. The harder he danced, the louder he sang, the more was he conscious that this phantom was gaining upon him, that in time it would track him down. One Sunday afternoon, late in the fall, when he had been drinking beer with Lena Hanson and listening to a song which made his cheeks burn, a rattlesnake had crawled out of the side of the sod house and thrust its ugly head in under the screen door. He was not afraid of snakes, but he knew enough of Gospellism to feel the significance of the reptile lying coiled there upon her doorstep. His lips were cold when he kissed Lena good-by, and he went there no more.

The final barrier between Eric and his mother's faith was his violin, and to that he clung as a man sometimes will cling to his dearest sin, to the weakness more precious to him than all his strength. In the great world beauty comes to men in many guises, and art in a hundred forms, but for Eric there was only his violin. It stood, to him, for all the manifestations of art; it was his only bridge into the kingdom of the soul.

It was to Eric Hermannson that the evangelist directed his impassioned pleading that night.

"_Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?_ Is there a Saul here to-night who has stopped his ears to that gentle pleading, who has thrust a spear into that bleeding side? Think of it, my brother; you are offered this wonderful love and you prefer the worm that dieth not and the fire which will not be quenched. What right have you to lose one of God's precious souls? _Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?_"

A great joy dawned in Asa Skinner's pale face, for he saw that Eric Hermannson was swaying to and fro in his seat. The minister fell upon his knees and threw his long arms up over his head.

"O my brothers! I feel it coming, the blessing we have prayed for. I tell you the Spirit is coming! Just a little more prayer, brothers, a little more zeal, and he will be here. I can feel his cooling wing upon my brow. Glory be to God forever and ever, amen!"

The whole congregation groaned under the pressure of this spiritual panic. Shouts and hallelujahs went up from every lip. Another figure fell prostrate upon the floor. From the mourners' bench rose a chant of terror and rapture:

"Eating honey and drinking wine,
Glory to the bleeding Lamb!
I am my Lord's and he is mine,
Glory to the bleeding Lamb!"

The hymn was sung in a dozen dialects and voiced all the vague yearning of these hungry lives, of these people who had starved all the passions so long, only to fall victims to the basest of them all, fear.

A groan of ultimate anguish rose from Eric Hermannson's bowed head, and the sound was like the groan of a great tree when it falls in the forest.

The minister rose suddenly to his feet and threw back his head, crying in a loud voice:

"_Lazarus, come forth!_ Eric Hermannson, you are lost, going down at sea. In the name of God, and Jesus Christ his Son, I throw you the life-line. Take hold! Almighty God, my soul for his!" The minister threw his arms out and lifted his quivering face.

Eric Hermannson rose to his feet; his lips were set and the lightning was in his eyes. He took his violin by the neck and crushed it to splinters across his knee, and to Asa Skinner the sound was like the shackles of sin broken audibly asunder.

II.

For more than two years Eric Hermannson kept the austere faith to which he had sworn himself, kept it until a girl from the East came to spend a week on the Nebraska Divide. She was a girl of other manners and conditions, and there were greater distances between her life and Eric's than all the miles which separated Rattlesnake Creek from New York city. Indeed, she had no business to be in the West at all; but ah! across what leagues of land and sea, by what improbable chances, do the unrelenting gods bring to us our fate!

It was in a year of financial depression that Wyllis Elliot came to Nebraska to buy cheap land and revisit the country where he had spent a year of his youth. When he had graduated from Harvard it was still customary for moneyed gentlemen to send their scapegrace sons to rough it on ranches in the wilds of Nebraska or Dakota, or to consign them to a living death in the sage-brush of the Black Hills. These young men did not always return to the ways of civilized life. But Wyllis Elliot had not married a half-breed, nor been shot in a cow-punchers' brawl, nor wrecked by bad whisky, nor appropriated by a smirched adventuress. He had been saved from these things by a girl, his sister, who had been very near to his life ever since the days when they read fairy tales together and dreamed the dreams that

never come true. On this, his first visit to his father's ranch since he left it six years before, he brought her with him. She had been laid up half the winter from a sprain received while skating, and had had too much time for reflection during those months. She was restless and filled with a desire to see something of the wild country of which her brother had told her so much. She was to be married the next winter, and Wyllis understood her when she begged him to take her with him on this long, aimless jaunt across the continent, to taste the last of their freedom together. It comes to all women of her type--that desire to taste the unknown which allures and terrifies, to run one's whole soul's length out to the wind--just once.

It had been an eventful journey. Wyllis somehow understood that strain of gypsy blood in his sister, and he knew where to take her. They had slept in sod houses on the Platte River, made the acquaintance of the personnel of a third-rate opera company on the train to Deadwood, dined in a camp of railroad constructors at the world's end beyond New Castle, gone through the Black Hills on horseback, fished for trout in Dome Lake, watched a dance at Cripple Creek, where the lost souls who hide in the hills gathered for their besotted revelry. And now, last of all, before the return to thralldom, there was this little shack, anchored on the windy crest of the Divide, a little black dot against the flaming sunsets, a scented sea of cornland bathed in opalescent air and blinding sunlight.

Margaret Elliot was one of those women of whom there are so many in this day, when old order, passing, giveth place to new; beautiful, talented, critical, unsatisfied, tired of the world at twenty-four. For the moment the life and people of the Divide interested her. She was there but a week; perhaps had she stayed longer, that inexorable ennui which travels faster even than the Vestibule Limited would have overtaken her. The week she tarried there was the week that Eric Hermannson was helping Jerry Lockhart thresh; a week earlier or a week later, and there would have been no story to write.

It was on Thursday and they were to leave on Saturday. Wyllis and

his sister were sitting on the wide piazza of the ranchhouse, staring out into the afternoon sunlight and protesting against the gusts of hot wind that blew up from the sandy river-bottom twenty miles to the southward.

The young man pulled his cap lower over his eyes and remarked:

"This wind is the real thing; you don't strike it anywhere else. You remember we had a touch of it in Algiers and I told you it came from Kansas. It's the key-note of this country."

Wyllis touched her hand that lay on the hammock and continued gently:

"I hope it's paid you, Sis. Roughing it's dangerous business; it takes the taste out of things."

She shut her fingers firmly over the brown hand that was so like her own.

"Paid? Why, Wyllis, I haven't been so happy since we were children and were going to discover the ruins of Troy together some day. Do you know, I believe I could just stay on here forever and let the world go on its own gait. It seems as though the tension and strain we used to talk of last winter were gone for good, as though one could never give one's strength out to such petty things any more."

Wyllis brushed the ashes of his pipe away from the silk handkerchief that was knotted about his neck and stared moodily off at the sky-line.

"No, you're mistaken. This would bore you after a while. You can't shake the fever of the other life. I've tried it. There was a time when the gay fellows of Rome could trot down into the Thebaid and burrow into the sandhills and get rid of it. But it's all too complex now. You see we've made our dissipations so dainty and respectable that they've gone further in than the flesh, and taken hold of the ego proper. You couldn't rest, even here. The war-cry

would follow you."

"You don't waste words, Wyllis, but you never miss fire. I talk more than you do, without saying half so much. You must have learned the art of silence from these taciturn Norwegians. I think I like silent men."

"Naturally," said Wyllis, "since you have decided to marry the most brilliant talker you know."

Both were silent for a time, listening to the sighing of the hot wind through the parched morning-glory vines. Margaret spoke first.

"Tell me, Wyllis, were many of the Norwegians you used to know as interesting as Eric Hermannson?"

"Who, Siegfried? Well, no. He used to be the flower of the Norwegian youth in my day, and he's rather an exception, even now. He has retrograded, though. The bonds of the soil have tightened on him, I fancy."

"Siegfried? Come, that's rather good, Wyllis. He looks like a dragon-slayer. What is it that makes him so different from the others? I can talk to him; he seems quite like a human being."

"Well," said Wyllis, meditatively, "I don't read Bourget as much as my cultured sister, and I'm not so well up in analysis, but I fancy it's because one keeps cherishing a perfectly unwarranted suspicion that under that big, hulking anatomy of his, he may conceal a soul somewhere. Nicht wahr?"

"Something like that," said Margaret, thoughtfully, "except that it's more than a suspicion, and it isn't groundless. He has one, and he makes it known, somehow, without speaking."

"I always have my doubts about loquacious souls," Wyllis remarked, with the unbelieving smile that had grown habitual with him.

Margaret went on, not heeding the interruption. "I knew it from the first, when he told me about the suicide of his cousin, the Bernstein boy. That kind of blunt pathos can't be summoned at will in anybody. The earlier novelists rose to it, sometimes, unconsciously. But last night when I sang for him I was doubly sure. Oh, I haven't told you about that yet! Better light your pipe again. You see, he stumbled in on me in the dark when I was pumping away at that old parlor organ to please Mrs. Lockhart. It's her household fetish and I've forgotten how many pounds of butter she made and sold to buy it. Well, Eric stumbled in, and in some inarticulate manner made me understand that he wanted me to sing for him. I sang just the old things, of course. It's queer to sing familiar things here at the world's end. It makes one think how the hearts of men have carried them around the world, into the wastes of Iceland and the jungles of Africa and the islands of the Pacific. I think if one lived here long enough one would quite forget how to be trivial, and would read only the great books that we never get time to read in the world, and would remember only the great music, and the things that are really worth while would stand out clearly against that horizon over there. And of course I played the intermezzo from 'Cavalleria Rusticana' for him; it goes rather better on an organ than most things do. He shuffled his feet and twisted his big hands up into knots and blurted out that he didn't know there was any music like that in the world. Why, there were tears in his voice, Wyllis! Yes, like Rossetti, I heard his tears. Then it dawned upon me that it was probably the first good music he had ever heard in all his life. Think of it, to care for music as he does and never to hear it, never to know that it exists on earth! To long for it as we long for other perfect experiences that never come. I can't tell you what music means to that man. I never saw any one so susceptible to it. It gave him speech, he became alive. When I had finished the intermezzo, he began telling me about a little crippled brother who died and whom he loved and used to carry everywhere in his arms. He did not wait for encouragement. He took up the story and told it slowly, as if to himself, just sort of rose up and told his own woe to answer Mascagni's. It overcame me."

"Poor devil," said Wyllis, looking at her with mysterious eyes, "and

so you've given him a new woe. Now he'll go on wanting Grieg and Schubert the rest of his days and never getting them. That's a girl's philanthropy for you!"

Jerry Lockhart came out of the house screwing his chin over the unusual luxury of a stiff white collar, which his wife insisted upon as a necessary article of toilet while Miss Elliot was at the house. Jerry sat down on the step and smiled his broad, red smile at Margaret.

"Well, I've got the music for your dance, Miss Elliot. Olaf Oleson will bring his accordion and Mollie will play the organ, when she isn't lookin' after the grub, and a little chap from Frenchtown will bring his fiddle--though the French don't mix with the Norwegians much."

"Delightful! Mr. Lockhart, that dance will be the feature of our trip, and it's so nice of you to get it up for us. We'll see the Norwegians in character at last," cried Margaret, cordially.

"See here, Lockhart, I'll settle with you for backing her in this scheme," said Wyllis, sitting up and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "She's done crazy things enough on this trip, but to talk of dancing all night with a gang of half-mad Norwegians and taking the carriage at four to catch the six o'clock train out of Riverton--well, it's tommy-rot, that's what it is!"

"Wyllis, I leave it to your sovereign power of reason to decide whether it isn't easier to stay up all night than to get up at three in the morning. To get up at three, think what that means! No, sir, I prefer to keep my vigil and then get into a sleeper."

"But what do you want with the Norwegians? I thought you were tired of dancing."

"So I am, with some people. But I want to see a Norwegian dance, and I intend to. Come, Wyllis, you know how seldom it is that one really wants to do anything nowadays. I wonder when I have really wanted to

go to a party before. It will be something to remember next month at Newport, when we have to and don't want to. Remember your own theory that contrast is about the only thing that makes life endurable. This is my party and Mr. Lockhart's; your whole duty to-morrow night will consist in being nice to the Norwegian girls. I'll warrant you were adept enough at it once. And you'd better be very nice indeed, for if there are many such young valkyrs as Eric's sister among them, they would simply tie you up in a knot if they suspected you were guying them."

Wyllis groaned and sank back into the hammock to consider his fate, while his sister went on.

"And the guests, Mr. Lockhart, did they accept?"

Lockhart took out his knife and began sharpening it on the sole of his plowshoe.

"Well, I guess we'll have a couple dozen. You see it's pretty hard to get a crowd together here any more. Most of 'em have gone over to the Free Gospellers, and they'd rather put their feet in the fire than shake 'em to a fiddle."

Margaret made a gesture of impatience.

"Those Free Gospellers have just cast an evil spell over this country, haven't they?"

"Well," said Lockhart, cautiously, "I don't just like to pass judgment on any Christian sect, but if you're to know the chosen by their works, the Gospellers can't make a very proud showin', an' that's a fact. They're responsible for a few suicides, and they've sent a good-sized delegation to the state insane asylum, an' I don't see as they've made the rest of us much better than we were before. I had a little herdboys last spring, as square a little Dane as I want to work for me, but after the Gospellers got hold of him and sanctified him, the little beggar used to get down on his knees out on the prairie and pray by the hour and let the cattle get into the

corn, an' I had to fire him. That's about the way it goes. Now there's Eric; that chap used to be a hustler and the spryest dancer in all this section--called all the dances. Now he's got no ambition and he's glum as a preacher. I don't suppose we can even get him to come in to-morrow night."

"Eric? Why, he must dance, we can't let him off," said Margaret, quickly. "Why, I intend to dance with him myself!"

"I'm afraid he won't dance. I asked him this morning if he'd help us out and he said, 'I don't dance now, any more,'" said Lockhart, imitating the labored English of the Norwegian.

"The Miller of Hoffbau, the Miller of Hoffbau, O my Princess!" chirped Wyllis, cheerfully, from his hammock.

The red on his sister's cheek deepened a little, and she laughed mischievously. "We'll see about that, sir. I'll not admit that I am beaten until I have asked him myself."

Every night Eric rode over to St. Anne, a little village in the heart of the French settlement, for the mail. As the road lay through the most attractive part of the Divide country, on several occasions Margaret Elliot and her brother had accompanied him. To-night Wyllis had business with Lockhart, and Margaret rode with Eric, mounted on a frisky little mustang that Mrs. Lockhart had broken to the side-saddle. Margaret regarded her escort very much as she did the servant who always accompanied her on long rides at home, and the ride to the village was a silent one. She was occupied with thoughts of another world, and Eric was wrestling with more thoughts than had ever been crowded into his head before. He rode with his eyes riveted on that slight figure before him, as though he wished to absorb it through the optic nerves and hold it in his brain forever. He understood the situation perfectly. His brain worked slowly, but he had a keen sense of the values of things. This girl represented an entirely new species of humanity to him, but he knew where to place her. The prophets of old, when an angel first appeared unto them, never doubted its high origin.

Eric was patient under the adverse conditions of his life, but he was not servile. The Norse blood in him had not entirely lost its self-reliance. He came of a proud fisher line, men who were not afraid of anything but the ice and the devil, and he had prospects before him when his father went down off the North Cape in the long Arctic night, and his mother, seized by a violent horror of seafaring life, had followed her brother to America. Eric was eighteen then, handsome as young Siegfried, a giant in stature, with a skin singularly pure and delicate, like a Swede's; hair as yellow as the locks of Tennyson's amorous Prince, and eyes of a fierce, burning blue, whose flash was most dangerous to women. He had in those days a certain pride of bearing, a certain confidence of approach, that usually accompanies physical perfection. It was even said of him then that he was in love with life, and inclined to levity, a vice most unusual on the Divide. But the sad history of those Norwegian exiles, transplanted in an arid soil and under a scorching sun, had repeated itself in his case. Toil and isolation had sobered him, and he grew more and more like the clods among which he labored. It was as though some red-hot instrument had touched for a moment those delicate fibers of the brain which respond to acute pain or pleasure, in which lies the power of exquisite sensation, and had seared them quite away. It is a painful thing to watch the light die out of the eyes of those Norsemen, leaving an expression of impenetrable sadness, quite passive, quite hopeless, a shadow that is never lifted. With some this change comes almost at once, in the first bitterness of homesickness, with others it comes more slowly, according to the time it takes each man's heart to die.

Oh, those poor Northmen of the Divide! They are dead many a year before they are put to rest in the little graveyard on the windy hill where exiles of all nations grow akin.

The peculiar species of hypochondria to which the exiles of his people sooner or later succumb had not developed in Eric until that night at the Lone Star schoolhouse, when he had broken his violin across his knee. After that, the gloom of his people settled down

upon him, and the gospel of maceration began its work. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out," et cetera. The pagan smile that once hovered about his lips was gone, and he was one with sorrow. Religion heals a hundred hearts for one that it embitters, but when it destroys, its work is quick and deadly, and where the agony of the cross has been, joy will not come again. This man understood things literally: one must live without pleasure to die without fear; to save the soul it was necessary to starve the soul.

The sun hung low above the cornfields when Margaret and her cavalier left St. Anne. South of the town there is a stretch of road that runs for some three miles through the French settlement, where the prairie is as level as the surface of a lake. There the fields of flax and wheat and rye are bordered by precise rows of slender, tapering Lombard poplars. It was a yellow world that Margaret Elliot saw under the wide light of the setting sun.

The girl gathered up her reins and called back to Eric, "It will be safe to run the horses here, won't it?"

"Yes, I think so, now," he answered, touching his spur to his pony's flank. They were off like the wind. It is an old saying in the West that new-comers always ride a horse or two to death before they get broken in to the country. They are tempted by the great open spaces and try to outride the horizon, to get to the end of something. Margaret galloped over the level road, and Eric, from behind, saw her long veil fluttering in the wind. It had fluttered just so in his dreams last night and the night before. With a sudden inspiration of courage he overtook her and rode beside her, looking intently at her half-averted face. Before, he had only stolen occasional glances at it, seen it in blinding flashes, always with more or less embarrassment, but now he determined to let every line of it sink into his memory. Men of the world would have said that it was an unusual face, nervous, finely cut, with clear, elegant lines that betokened ancestry. Men of letters would have called it a historic face, and would have conjectured at what old passions, long asleep, what old sorrows forgotten time out of mind, doing battle together in ages gone, had curved those delicate nostrils, left

their unconscious memory in those eyes. But Eric read no meaning in these details. To him this beauty was something more than color and line; it was as a flash of white light, in which one cannot distinguish color because all colors are there. To him it was a complete revelation, an embodiment of those dreams of impossible loveliness that linger by a young man's pillow on midsummer nights; yet, because it held something more than the attraction of health and youth and shapeliness, it troubled him, and in its presence he felt as the Goths before the white marbles in the Roman Capitol, not knowing whether they were men or gods. At times he felt like uncovering his head before it, again the fury seized him to break and despoil, to find the clay in this spirit-thing and stamp upon it. Away from her, he longed to strike out with his arms, and take and hold; it maddened him that this woman whom he could break in his hands should be so much stronger than he. But near her, he never questioned this strength; he admitted its potentiality as he admitted the miracles of the Bible; it enervated and conquered him. To-night, when he rode so close to her that he could have touched her, he knew that he might as well reach out his hand to take a star.

Margaret stirred uneasily under his gaze and turned questioningly in her saddle.

"This wind puts me a little out of breath when we ride fast," she said.

Eric turned his eyes away.

"I want to ask you if I go to New York to work, if I maybe hear music like you sang last night? I been a purty good hand to work," he asked, timidly.

Margaret looked at him with surprise, and then, as she studied the outline of his face, pityingly.

"Well, you might--but you'd lose a good deal else. I shouldn't like you to go to New York--and be poor, you'd be out of atmosphere, some

way," she said, slowly. Inwardly she was thinking: "There he would be altogether sordid, impossible--a machine who would carry one's trunks upstairs, perhaps. Here he is every inch a man, rather picturesque; why is it?" "No," she added aloud, "I shouldn't like that."

"Then I not go," said Eric, decidedly.

Margaret turned her face to hide a smile. She was a trifle amused and a trifle annoyed. Suddenly she spoke again.

"But I'll tell you what I do want you to do, Eric. I want you to dance with us to-morrow night and teach me some of the Norwegian dances; they say you know them all. Won't you?"

Eric straightened himself in his saddle and his eyes flashed as they had done in the Lone Star schoolhouse when he broke his violin across his knee.

"Yes, I will," he said, quietly, and he believed that he delivered his soul to hell as he said it.

They had reached the rougher country now, where the road wound through a narrow cut in one of the bluffs along the creek, when a beat of hoofs ahead and the sharp neighing of horses made the ponies start and Eric rose in his stirrups. Then down the gulch in front of them and over the steep clay banks thundered a herd of wild ponies, nimble as monkeys and wild as rabbits, such as horse-traders drive east from the plains of Montana to sell in the farming country. Margaret's pony made a shrill sound, a neigh that was almost a scream, and started up the clay bank to meet them, all the wild blood of the range breaking out in an instant. Margaret called to Eric just as he threw himself out of the saddle and caught her pony's bit. But the wiry little animal had gone mad and was kicking and biting like a devil. Her wild brothers of the range were all about her, neighing, and pawing the earth, and striking her with their fore feet and snapping at her flanks. It was the old liberty of the range that the little beast fought for.

"Drop the reins and hold tight, tight!" Eric called, throwing all his weight upon the bit, struggling under those frantic fore feet that now beat at his breast, and now kicked at the wild mustangs that surged and tossed about him. He succeeded in wrenching the pony's head toward him and crowding her withers against the clay bank, so that she could not roll.

"Hold tight, tight!" he shouted again, launching a kick at a snorting animal that reared back against Margaret's saddle. If she should lose her courage and fall now, under those hoofs----He struck out again and again, kicking right and left with all his might. Already the negligent drivers had galloped into the cut, and their long quirts were whistling over the heads of the herd. As suddenly as it had come, the struggling, frantic wave of wild life swept up out of the gulch and on across the open prairie, and with a long despairing whinny of farewell the pony dropped her head and stood trembling in her sweat, shaking the foam and blood from her bit.

Eric stepped close to Margaret's side and laid his hand on her saddle. "You are not hurt?" he asked, hoarsely. As he raised his face in the soft starlight she saw that it was white and drawn and that his lips were working nervously.

"No, no, not at all. But you, you are suffering; they struck you!" she cried in sharp alarm.

He stepped back and drew his hand across his brow.

"No, it is not that," he spoke rapidly now, with his hands clenched at his side. "But if they had hurt you, I would beat their brains out with my hands, I would kill them all. I was never afraid before. You are the only beautiful thing that has ever come close to me. You came like an angel out of the sky. You are like the music you sing, you are like the stars and the snow on the mountains where I played when I was a little boy. You are like all that I wanted once and never had, you are all that they have killed in me. I die for you to-night, to-morrow, for all eternity. I am not a coward; I was

afraid because I love you more than Christ who died for me, more than I am afraid of hell, or hope for heaven. I was never afraid before. If you had fallen--oh, my God!" he threw his arms out blindly and dropped his head upon the pony's mane, leaning limply against the animal like a man struck by some sickness. His shoulders rose and fell perceptibly with his labored breathing. The horse stood cowed with exhaustion and fear. Presently Margaret laid her hand on Eric's head and said gently:

"You are better now, shall we go on? Can you get your horse?"

"No, he has gone with the herd. I will lead yours, she is not safe. I will not frighten you again." His voice was still husky, but it was steady now. He took hold of the bit and tramped home in silence.

When they reached the house, Eric stood stolidly by the pony's head until Wyllis came to lift his sister from the saddle.

"The horses were badly frightened, Wyllis. I think I was pretty thoroughly scared myself," she said as she took her brother's arm and went slowly up the hill toward the house. "No, I'm not hurt, thanks to Eric. You must thank him for taking such good care of me. He's a mighty fine fellow. I'll tell you all about it in the morning, dear. I was pretty well shaken up and I'm going right to bed now. Good-night."

When she reached the low room in which she slept, she sank upon the bed in her riding-dress face downward.

"Oh, I pity him! I pity him!" she murmured, with a long sigh of exhaustion. She must have slept a little. When she rose again, she took from her dress a letter that had been waiting for her at the village post-office. It was closely written in a long, angular hand, covering a dozen pages of foreign note-paper, and began:--

"My Dearest Margaret: If I should attempt to say _how like a winter hath thine absence been_, I should incur the risk of being tedious. Really, it takes the sparkle out of everything. Having nothing

better to do, and not caring to go anywhere in particular without you, I remained in the city until Jack Courtwell noted my general despondency and brought me down here to his place on the sound to manage some open-air theatricals he is getting up. 'As You Like It' is of course the piece selected. Miss Harrison plays Rosalind. I wish you had been here to take the part. Miss Harrison reads her lines well, but she is either a maiden-all-forlorn or a tomboy; insists on reading into the part all sorts of deeper meanings and highly colored suggestions wholly out of harmony with the pastoral setting. Like most of the professionals, she exaggerates the emotional element and quite fails to do justice to Rosalind's facile wit and really brilliant mental qualities. Gerard will do Orlando, but rumor says he is épris of your sometime friend, Miss Meredith, and his memory is treacherous and his interest fitful.

"My new pictures arrived last week on the 'Gascogne.' The Puvis de Chavannes is even more beautiful than I thought it in Paris. A pale dream-maiden sits by a pale dream-cow, and a stream of anemic water flows at her feet. The Constant, you will remember, I got because you admired it. It is here in all its florid splendor, the whole dominated by a glowing sensuousness. The drapery of the female figure is as wonderful as you said; the fabric all barbaric pearl and gold, painted with an easy, effortless voluptuousness, and that white, gleaming line of African coast in the background recalls memories of you very precious to me. But it is useless to deny that Constant irritates me. Though I cannot prove the charge against him, his brilliancy always makes me suspect him of cheapness."

Here Margaret stopped and glanced at the remaining pages of this strange love-letter. They seemed to be filled chiefly with discussions of pictures and books, and with a slow smile she laid them by.

She rose and began undressing. Before she lay down she went to open the window. With her hand on the sill, she hesitated, feeling suddenly as though some danger were lurking outside, some inordinate desire waiting to spring upon her in the darkness. She stood there for a long time, gazing at the infinite sweep of the sky.

"Oh, it is all so little, so little there," she murmured. "When everything else is so dwarfed, why should one expect love to be great? Why should one try to read highly colored suggestions into a life like that? If only I could find one thing in it all that mattered greatly, one thing that would warm me when I am alone! Will life never give me that one great moment?"

As she raised the window, she heard a sound in the plum-bushes outside. It was only the house-dog roused from his sleep, but Margaret started violently and trembled so that she caught the foot of the bed for support. Again she felt herself pursued by some overwhelming longing, some desperate necessity for herself, like the outstretching of helpless, unseen arms in the darkness, and the air seemed heavy with sighs of yearning. She fled to her bed with the words, "I love you more than Christ, who died for me!" ringing in her ears.

III.

About midnight the dance at Lockhart's was at its height. Even the old men who had come to "look on" caught the spirit of revelry and stamped the floor with the vigor of old Silenus. Eric took the violin from the Frenchman, and Minna Oleson sat at the organ, and the music grew more and more characteristic--rude, half-mournful music, made up of the folk-songs of the North, that the villagers sing through the long night in hamlets by the sea, when they are thinking of the sun, and the spring, and the fishermen so long away. To Margaret some of it sounded like Grieg's Peer Gynt music. She found something irresistibly infectious in the mirth of these people who were so seldom merry, and she felt almost one of them. Something seemed struggling for freedom in them to-night, something of the joyous childhood of the nations which exile had not killed. The girls were all boisterous with delight. Pleasure came to them but rarely, and when it came, they caught at it wildly and crushed its fluttering wings in their strong brown fingers. They had a hard life enough, most of them. Torrid summers and freezing winters, labor and

drudgery and ignorance, were the portion of their girlhood; a short wooing, a hasty, loveless marriage, unlimited maternity, thankless sons, premature age and ugliness, were the dower of their womanhood. But what matter? To-night there was hot liquor in the glass and hot blood in the heart; to-night they danced.

To-night Eric Hermannson had renewed his youth. He was no longer the big, silent Norwegian who had sat at Margaret's feet and looked hopelessly into her eyes. To-night he was a man, with a man's rights and a man's power. To-night he was Siegfried indeed. His hair was yellow as the heavy wheat in the ripe of summer, and his eyes flashed like the blue water between the ice-packs in the North Seas. He was not afraid of Margaret to-night, and when he danced with her he held her firmly. She was tired and dragged on his arm a little, but the strength of the man was like an all-pervading fluid, stealing through her veins, awakening under her heart some nameless, unsuspected existence that had slumbered there all these years and that went out through her throbbing fingertips to his that answered. She wondered if the hoydenish blood of some lawless ancestor, long asleep, were calling out in her to-night, some drop of a hotter fluid that the centuries had failed to cool, and why, if this curse were in her, it had not spoken before. But was it a curse, this awakening, this wealth before undiscovered, this music set free? For the first time in her life her heart held something stronger than herself, was not this worth while? Then she ceased to wonder. She lost sight of the lights and the faces, and the music was drowned by the beating of her own arteries. She saw only the blue eyes that flashed above her, felt only the warmth of that throbbing hand which held hers and which the blood of his heart fed. Dimly, as in a dream, she saw the drooping shoulders, high white forehead and tight, cynical mouth of the man she was to marry in December. For an hour she had been crowding back the memory of that face with all her strength.

"Let us stop, this is enough," she whispered. His only answer was to tighten the arm behind her. She sighed and let that masterful strength bear her where it would. She forgot that this man was little more than a savage, that they would part at dawn. The blood

has no memories, no reflections, no regrets for the past, no consideration of the future.

"Let us go out where it is cooler," she said when the music stopped; thinking, "I am growing faint here, I shall be all right in the open air." They stepped out into the cool, blue air of the night.

Since the older folk had begun dancing, the young Norwegians had been slipping out in couples to climb the windmill tower into the cooler atmosphere, as is their custom.

"You like to go up?" asked Eric, close to her ear.

She turned and looked at him with suppressed amusement. "How high is it?"

"Forty feet, about. I not let you fall." There was a note of irresistible pleading in his voice, and she felt that he tremendously wished her to go. Well, why not? This was a night of the unusual, when she was not herself at all, but was living an unreality. To-morrow, yes, in a few hours, there would be the Vestibule Limited and the world.

"Well, if you'll take good care of me. I used to be able to climb, when I was a little girl."

Once at the top and seated on the platform, they were silent. Margaret wondered if she would not hunger for that scene all her life, through all the routine of the days to come. Above them stretched the great Western sky, serenely blue, even in the night, with its big, burning stars, never so cold and dead and far away as in denser atmospheres. The moon would not be up for twenty minutes yet, and all about the horizon, that wide horizon, which seemed to reach around the world, lingered a pale, white light, as of a universal dawn. The weary wind brought up to them the heavy odors of the cornfields. The music of the dance sounded faintly from below. Eric leaned on his elbow beside her, his legs swinging down on the ladder. His great shoulders looked more than ever like those of the

stone Doryphorus, who stands in his perfect, reposeful strength in the Louvre, and had often made her wonder if such men died forever with the youth of Greece.

"How sweet the corn smells at night," said Margaret nervously.

"Yes, like the flowers that grow in paradise, I think."

She was somewhat startled by this reply, and more startled when this taciturn man spoke again.

"You go away to-morrow?"

"Yes, we have stayed longer than we thought to now."

"You not come back any more?"

"No, I expect not. You see, it is a long trip; half-way across the continent."

"You soon forget about this country, I guess." It seemed to him now a little thing to lose his soul for this woman, but that she should utterly forget this night into which he threw all his life and all his eternity, that was a bitter thought.

"No, Eric, I will not forget. You have all been too kind to me for that. And you won't be sorry you danced this one night, will you?"

"I never be sorry. I have not been so happy before. I not be so happy again, ever. You will be happy many nights yet, I only this one. I will dream sometimes, maybe."

The mighty resignation of his tone alarmed and touched her. It was as when some great animal composes itself for death, as when a great ship goes down at sea.

She sighed, but did not answer him. He drew a little closer and looked into her eyes.

"You are not always happy, too?" he asked.

"No, not always, Eric; not very often, I think."

"You have a trouble?"

"Yes, but I cannot put it into words. Perhaps if I could do that, I could cure it."

He clasped his hands together over his heart, as children do when they pray, and said falteringly, "If I own all the world, I give him you."

Margaret felt a sudden moisture in her eyes, and laid her hand on his.

"Thank you, Eric; I believe you would. But perhaps even then I should not be happy. Perhaps I have too much of it already."

She did not take her hand away from him; she did not dare. She sat still and waited for the traditions in which she had always believed to speak and save her. But they were dumb. She belonged to an ultra-refined civilization which tries to cheat nature with elegant sophistries. Cheat nature? Bah! One generation may do it, perhaps two, but the third--- Can we ever rise above nature or sink below her? Did she not turn on Jerusalem as upon Sodom, upon St. Anthony in his desert as upon Nero in his seraglio? Does she not always cry in brutal triumph: "I am here still, at the bottom of things, warming the roots of life; you cannot starve me nor tame me nor thwart me; I made the world, I rule it, and I am its destiny."

This woman, on a windmill tower at the world's end with a giant barbarian, heard that cry to-night, and she was afraid! Ah! the terror and the delight of that moment when first we fear ourselves! Until then we have not lived.

"Come, Eric, let us go down; the moon is up and the music has begun

again," she said.

He rose silently and stepped down upon the ladder, putting his arm about her to help her. That arm could have thrown Thor's hammer out in the cornfields yonder, yet it scarcely touched her, and his hand trembled as it had done in the dance. His face was level with hers now and the moonlight fell sharply upon it. All her life she had searched the faces of men for the look that lay in his eyes. She knew that that look had never shone for her before, would never shine for her on earth again, that such love comes to one only in dreams or in impossible places like this, unattainable always. This was Love's self, in a moment it would die. Stung by the agonized appeal that emanated from the man's whole being, she leaned forward and laid her lips on his. Once, twice and again she heard the deep respirations rattle in his throat while she held them there, and the riotous force under her heart became an engulfing weakness. He drew her up to him until he felt all the resistance go out of her body, until every nerve relaxed and yielded. When she drew her face back from his, it was white with fear.

"Let us go down, oh, my God! let us go down!" she muttered. And the drunken stars up yonder seemed reeling to some appointed doom as she clung to the rounds of the ladder. All that she was to know of love she had left upon his lips.

"The devil is loose again," whispered Olaf Oleson, as he saw Eric dancing a moment later, his eyes blazing.

But Eric was thinking with an almost savage exultation of the time when he should pay for this. Ah, there would be no quailing then! If ever a soul went fearlessly, proudly down to the gates infernal, his should go. For a moment he fancied he was there already, treading down the tempest of flame, hugging the fiery hurricane to his breast. He wondered whether in ages gone, all the countless years of sinning in which men had sold and lost and flung their souls away, any man had ever so cheated Satan, had ever bartered his soul for so great a price.

It seemed but a little while till dawn.

The carriage was brought to the door and Wyllis Elliot and his sister said good-by. She could not meet Eric's eyes as she gave him her hand, but as he stood by the horse's head, just as the carriage moved off, she gave him one swift glance that said, "I will not forget." In a moment the carriage was gone.

Eric changed his coat and plunged his head into the watertank and went to the barn to hook up his team. As he led his horses to the door, a shadow fell across his path, and he saw Skinner rising in his stirrups. His rugged face was pale and worn with looking after his wayward flock, with dragging men into the way of salvation.

"Good-morning, Eric. There was a dance here last night?" he asked, sternly.

"A dance? Oh, yes, a dance," replied Eric, cheerfully.

"Certainly you did not dance, Eric?"

"Yes, I danced. I danced all the time."

The minister's shoulders drooped, and an expression of profound discouragement settled over his haggard face. There was almost anguish in the yearning he felt for this soul.

"Eric, I didn't look for this from you. I thought God had set his mark on you if he ever had on any man. And it is for things like this that you set your soul back a thousand years from God. O foolish and perverse generation!"

Eric drew himself up to his full height and looked off to where the new day was gilding the corn-tassels and flooding the uplands with light. As his nostrils drew in the breath of the dew and the morning, something from the only poetry he had ever read flashed across his mind, and he murmured, half to himself, with dreamy exultation:

"And a day shall be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day."

Cosmopolitan, April 1900

THE FOUR FISTS by F. Scott Fitzgerald
from Flappers and Philosophers, Etext #4368

At the present time no one I know has the slightest desire to hit Samuel Meredith; possibly this is because a man over fifty is liable to be rather severely cracked at the impact of a hostile fist, but, for my part, I am inclined to think that all his hitable qualities have quite vanished. But it is certain that at various times in his life hitable qualities were in his face, as surely as kissable qualities have ever lurked in a girl's lips.

I'm sure every one has met a man like that, been casually introduced, even made a friend of him, yet felt he was the sort who aroused passionate dislike--expressed by some in the involuntary clinching of fists, and in others by mutterings about "takin' a poke" and "landin' a swift smash in ee eye." In the juxtaposition of Samuel Meredith's features this quality was so strong that it influenced his entire life.

What was it? Not the shape, certainly, for he was a pleasant-looking man from earliest youth: broad-bowed with gray eyes that were frank and friendly. Yet I've heard him tell a room full of reporters angling for a "success" story that he'd be ashamed to tell them the truth that they wouldn't believe it, that it wasn't one story but four, that the public would not want to read about a man who had been walloped into prominence.

It all started at Phillips Andover Academy when he was fourteen. He had been brought up on a diet of caviar and bell-boys' legs in half the capitals of Europe, and it was pure luck that his mother had nervous prostration and had to delegate his education to less tender, less biassed hands.

At Andover he was given a roommate named Gilly Hood. Gilly was thirteen, undersized, and rather the school pet. From the

September day when Mr. Meredith's valet stowed Samuel's clothing in the best bureau and asked, on departing, "hif there was hanything helse, Master Samuel?" Gilly cried out that the faculty had played him false. He felt like an irate frog in whose bowl has been put goldfish.

"Good gosh!" he complained to his sympathetic contemporaries, "he's a damn stuck-up Willie. He said, 'Are the crowd here gentlemen?' and I said, 'No, they're boys,' and he said age didn't matter, and I said, 'Who said it did?' Let him get fresh with me, the ole pieface!"

For three weeks Gilly endured in silence young Samuel's comments on the clothes and habits of Gilly's personal friends, endured French phrases in conversation, endured a hundred half-feminine meannesses that show what a nervous mother can do to a boy, if she keeps close enough to him--then a storm broke in the aquarium.

Samuel was out. A crowd had gathered to hear Gilly be wrathful about his roommate's latest sins.

"He said, 'Oh, I don't like the windows open at night,' he said, 'except only a little bit,'" complained Gilly.

"Don't let him boss you."

"Boss me? You bet he won't. I open those windows, I guess, but the darn fool won't take turns shuttin' 'em in the morning."

"Make him, Gilly, why don't you?"

"I'm going to." Gilly nodded his head in fierce agreement. "Don't you worry. He needn't think I'm any ole butler."

"Le's see you make him."

At this point the darn fool entered in person and included the crowd in one of his irritating smiles. Two boys said, "Lo,

Mer'dith"; the others gave him a chilly glance and went on talking to Gilly. But Samuel seemed unsatisfied.

"Would you mind not sitting on my bed?" he suggested politely to two of Gilly's particulars who were perched very much at ease.

"Huh?"

"My bed. Can't you understand English?"

This was adding insult to injury. There were several comments on the bed's sanitary condition and the evidence within it of animal life.

"S'matter with your old bed?" demanded Gilly truculently.

"The bed's all right, but---"

Gilly interrupted this sentence by rising and walking up to Samuel. He paused several inches away and eyed him fiercely.

"You an' your crazy ole bed," he began. "You an' your crazy---"

"Go to it, Gilly," murmured some one.

"Show the darn fool---"

Samuel returned the gaze coolly.

"Well," he said finally, "it's my bed--- "

He got no further, for Gilly hauled off and hit him succinctly in the nose.

"Yea! Gilly!"

"Show the big bully!"

Just let him touch you--he'll see!"

The group closed in on them and for the first time in his life Samuel realized the insuperable inconvenience of being passionately detested. He gazed around helplessly at the glowering, violently hostile faces. He towered a head taller than his roommate, so if he hit back he'd be called a bully and have half a dozen more fights on his hands within five minutes; yet if he didn't he was a coward. For a moment he stood there facing Gilly's blazing eyes, and then, with a sudden choking sound, he forced his way through the ring and rushed from the room.

The month following bracketed the thirty most miserable days of his life. Every waking moment he was under the lashing tongues of his contemporaries; his habits and mannerisms became butts for intolerable witticisms and, of course, the sensitiveness of adolescence was a further thorn. He considered that he was a natural pariah; that the unpopularity at school would follow him through life. When he went home for the Christmas holidays he was so despondent that his father sent him to a nerve specialist. When he returned to Andover he arranged to arrive late so that he could be alone in the bus during the drive from station to school.

Of course when he had learned to keep his mouth shut every one promptly forgot all about him. The next autumn, with his realization that consideration for others was the discreet attitude, he made good use of the clean start given him by the shortness of boyhood memory. By the beginning of his senior year Samuel Meredith was one of the best-liked boys of his class--and no one was any stronger for him than his first friend and constant companion, Gilly Hood.

Samuel became the sort of college student who in the early nineties drove tandems and coaches and tallyhos between Princeton and Yale and New York City to show that they appreciated the social importance of football games. He believed passionately in good form--his choosing of gloves, his tying of ties, his holding of reins were imitated by impressionable freshmen. Outside of his own set he was considered rather a snob, but as his set was THE set, it never worried him. He played football in the autumn, drank high-balls in the winter, and rowed in the spring. Samuel despised all those who were merely sportsmen without being gentlemen or merely gentlemen without being sportsmen.

He live in New York and often brought home several of his friends for the week-end. Those were the days of the horse-car and in case of a crush it was, of course, the proper thing for any one of Samuel's set to rise and deliver his seat to a standing lady with a formal bow. One night in Samuel's junior year he boarded a car with two of his intimates. There were three vacant seats. When Samuel sat down he noticed a heavy-eyed laboring man sitting next to him who smelt objectionably of garlic, sagged slightly against Samuel and, spreading a little as a tired man will, took up quite too much room.

The car had gone several blocks when it stopped for a quartet of young girls, and, of course, the three men of the world sprang to their feet and proffered their seats with due observance of form. Unfortunately, the laborer, being unacquainted with the code of neckties and tallyhos, failed to follow their example, and one young lady was left at an embarrassed stance. Fourteen eyes glared reproachfully at the barbarian; seven lips curled slightly; but the object of scorn stared stolidly into the foreground in sturdy unconsciousness of his despicable conduct. Samuel was the most violently affected. He was humiliated that any male should so conduct himself. He spoke aloud.

"There's a lady standing," he said sternly.

That should have been quite enough, but the object of scorn only looked up blankly. The standing girl tittered and exchanged nervous glances with her companions. But Samuel was aroused.

"There's a lady standing," he repeated, rather raspily. The man seemed to comprehend.

"I pay my fare," he said quietly.

Samuel turned red and his hands clinched, but the conductor was looking their way, so at a warning nod from his friends he subsided into sullen gloom.

They reached their destination and left the car, but so did the laborer, who followed them, swinging his little pail. Seeing his chance, Samuel no longer resisted his aristocratic inclination. He turned around and, launching a full-featured, dime-novel sneer, made a loud remark about the right of the lower animals to ride with human beings.

In a half-second the workman had dropped his pail and let fly at him. Unprepared, Samuel took the blow neatly on the jaw and sprawled full length into the cobblestone gutter.

"Don't laugh at me!" cried his assailant. "I been workin' all day. I'm tired as hell!"

As he spoke the sudden anger died out of his eyes and the mask of weariness dropped again over his face. He turned and picked up his pail. Samuel's friends took a quick step in his direction.

"Wait!" Samuel had risen slowly and was motioning back. Some time, somewhere, he had been struck like that before. Then he remembered--Gilly Hood. In the silence, as he dusted himself off, the whole scene in the room at Andover was before his eyes--and he knew intuitively that he had been wrong again. This man's strength, his rest, was the protection of his family. He

had more use for his seat in the street-car than any young girl.

"It's all right," said Samuel gruffly. "Don't touch 'him. I've been a damn fool."

Of course it took more than an hour, or a week, for Samuel to rearrange his ideas on the essential importance of good form. At first he simply admitted that his wrongness had made him powerless--as it had made him powerless against Gilly--but eventually his mistake about the workman influenced his entire attitude. Snobbishness is, after all, merely good breeding grown dictatorial; so Samuel's code remained but the necessity of imposing it upon others had faded out in a certain gutter. Within that year his class had somehow stopped referring to him as a snob.

III

After a few years Samuel's university decided that it had shone long enough in the reflected glory of his neckties, so they declaimed to him in Latin, charged him ten dollars for the paper which proved him irretrievably educated, and sent him into the turmoil with much self-confidence, a few friends, and the proper assortment of harmless bad habits.

His family had by that time started back to shirt-sleeves, through a sudden decline in the sugar-market, and it had already unbuttoned its vest, so to speak, when Samuel went to work. His mind was that exquisite TABULA RASA that a university education sometimes leaves, but he had both energy and influence, so he used his former ability as a dodging half-back in twisting through Wall Street crowds as runner for a bank.

His diversion was--women. There were half a dozen: two or three debutantes, an actress (in a minor way), a grass-widow, and one

sentimental little brunette who was married and lived in a little house in Jersey City.

They had met on a ferry-boat. Samuel was crossing from New York on business (he had been working several years by this time) and he helped her look for a package that she had dropped in the crush.

"Do you come over often?" he inquired casually.

"Just to shop," she said shyly. She had great brown eyes and the pathetic kind of little mouth. "I've only been married three months, and we find it cheaper to live over here."

"Does he--does your husband like your being alone like this?"

She laughed, a cheery young laugh.

"Oh, dear me, no. We were to meet for dinner but I must have misunderstood the place. He'll be awfully worried."

"Well," said Samuel disapprovingly, "he ought to be. If you'll allow me I'll see you home."

She accepted his offer thankfully, so they took the cable-car together. When they walked up the path to her little house they saw a light there; her husband had arrived before her.

"He's frightfully jealous," she announced, laughingly apologetic.

"Very well," answered Samuel, rather stiffly. "I'd better leave you here."

She thanked him and, waving a good night, he left her.

That would have been quite all if they hadn't met on Fifth Avenue one morning a week later. She started and blushed and seemed so glad to see him that they chatted like old friends. She was going to her dressmaker's, eat lunch alone at Taine's,

shop all afternoon, and meet her husband on the ferry at five. Samuel told her that her husband was a very lucky man. She blushed again and scurried off.

Samuel whistled all the way back to his office, but about twelve o'clock he began to see that pathetic, appealing little mouth everywhere--and those brown eyes. He fidgeted when he looked at the clock; he thought of the grill down-stairs where he lunched and the heavy male conversation thereof, and opposed to that picture appeared another; a little table at Taine's with the brown eyes and the mouth a few feet away. A few minutes before twelve-thirty he dashed on his hat and rushed for the cable-car.

She was quite surprised to see him.

"Why--hello," she said. Samuel could tell that she was just pleasantly frightened.

"I thought we might lunch together. It's so dull eating with a lot of men."

She hesitated.

"Why, I suppose there's no harm in it. How could there be!"

It occurred to her that her husband should have taken lunch with her--but he was generally so hurried at noon. She told Samuel all about him: he was a little smaller than Samuel, but, oh, MUCH better-looking. He was a book-keeper and not making a lot of money, but they were very happy and expected to be rich within three or four years.

Samuel's grass-widow had been in a quarrelsome mood for three or four weeks, and through contrast, he took an accentuated pleasure in this meeting; so fresh was she, and earnest, and faintly adventurous. Her name was Marjorie.

They made another engagement; in fact, for a month they lunched

together two or three times a week. When she was sure that her husband would work late Samuel took her over to New Jersey on the ferry, leaving her always on the tiny front porch, after she had gone in and lit the gas to use the security of his masculine presence outside. This grew to be a ceremony--and it annoyed him. Whenever the comfortable glow fell out through the front windows, that was his CONGE; yet he never suggested coming in and Marjorie didn't invite him.

Then, when Samuel and Marjorie had reached a stage in which they sometimes touched each other's arms gently, just to show that they were very good friends, Marjorie and her husband had one of those ultrasensitive, supercritical quarrels that couples never indulge in unless they care a great deal about each other. It started with a cold mutton-chop or a leak in the gas-jet--and one day Samuel found her in Taine's, with dark shadows under her brown eyes and a terrifying pout.

By this time Samuel thought he was in love with Marjorie--so he played up the quarrel for all it was worth. He was her best friend and patted her hand--and leaned down close to her brown curls while she whispered in little sobs what her husband had said that morning; and he was a little more than her best friend when he took her over to the ferry in a hansom.

"Marjorie," he said gently, when he left her, as usual, on the porch, "if at any time you want to call on me, remember that I am always waiting, always waiting."

She nodded gravely and put both her hands in his. "I know," she said. "I know you're my friend, my best friend."

Then she ran into the house and he watched there until the gas went on.

For the next week Samuel was in a nervous turmoil. Some persistently rational strain warned him that at bottom he and Marjorie had little in common, but in such cases there is

usually so much mud in the water that one can seldom see to the bottom. Every dream and desire told him that he loved Marjorie, wanted her, had to have her.

The quarrel developed. Marjorie's husband took to staying in New York until late at night came home several times disagreeably overstimulated, and made her generally miserable. They must have had too much pride to talk it out--for Marjorie's husband was, after all, pretty decent--so it drifted on from one misunderstanding to another. Marjorie kept coming more and more to Samuel; when a woman can accept masculine sympathy at is much more satisfactory to her than crying to another girl. But Marjorie didn't realize how much she had begun to rely on him, how much he was part of her little cosmos.

One night, instead of turning away when Marjorie went in and lit the gas, Samuel went in, too, and they sat together on the sofa in the little parlor. He was very happy. He envied their home, and he felt that the man who neglected such a possession out of stubborn pride was a fool and unworthy of his wife. But when he kissed Marjorie for the first time she cried softly and told him to go. He sailed home on the wings of desperate excitement, quite resolved to fan this spark of romance, no matter how big the blaze or who was burned. At the time he considered that his thoughts were unselfishly of her; in a later perspective he knew that she had meant no more than the white screen in a motion picture: it was just Samuel--blind, desirous.

Next day at Taine's, when they met for lunch, Samuel dropped all pretense and made frank love to her. He had no plans, no definite intentions, except to kiss her lips again, to hold her in his arms and feel that she was very little and pathetic and lovable. . . . He took her home, and this time they kissed until both their hearts beat high--words and phrases formed on his lips.

And then suddenly there were steps on the porch--a hand tried the outside door. Marjorie turned dead-white.

"Wait!" she whispered to Samuel, in a frightened voice, but in angry impatience at the interruption he walked to the front door and threw it open.

Every one has seen such scenes on the stage--seen them so often that when they actually happen people behave very much like actors. Samuel felt that he was playing a part and the lines came quite naturally: he announced that all had a right to lead their own lives and looked at Marjorie's husband menacingly, as if daring him to doubt it. Marjorie's husband spoke of the sanctity of the home, forgetting that it hadn't seemed very holy to him lately; Samuel continued along the line of "the right to happiness"; Marjorie's husband mentioned firearms and the divorce court. Then suddenly he stopped and scrutinized both of them--Marjorie in pitiful collapse on the sofa, Samuel haranguing the furniture in a consciously heroic pose.

"Go up-stairs, Marjorie," he said, in a different tone.

"Stay where you are!" Samuel countered quickly.

Marjorie rose, wavered, and sat down, rose again and moved hesitatingly toward the stairs.

"Come outside," said her husband to Samuel. "I want to talk to you."

Samuel glanced at Marjorie, tried to get some message from her eyes; then he shut his lips and went out.

There was a bright moon and when Marjorie's husband came down the steps Samuel could see plainly that he was suffering--but he felt no pity for him.

They stood and looked at each other, a few feet apart, and the husband cleared his throat as though it were a bit husky.

"That's my wife," he said quietly, and then a wild anger surged

up inside him. "Damn you!" he cried--and hit Samuel in the face with all his strength.

In that second, as Samuel slumped to the ground, it flashed to him that he had been hit like that twice before, and simultaneously the incident altered like a dream--he felt suddenly awake. Mechanically he sprang to his feet and squared off. The other man was waiting, fists up, a yard away, but Samuel knew that though physically he had him by several inches and many pounds, he wouldn't hit him. The situation had miraculously and entirely changed--a moment before Samuel had seemed to himself heroic; now he seemed the cad, the outsider, and Marjorie's husband, silhouetted against the lights of the little house, the eternal heroic figure, the defender of his home.

There was a pause and then Samuel turned quickly away and went down the path for the last time.

IV

Of course, after the third blow Samuel put in several weeks at conscientious introspection. The blow years before at Andover had landed on his personal unpleasantness; the workman of his college days had jarred the snobbishness out of his system, and Marjorie's husband had given a severe jolt to his greedy selfishness. It threw women out of his ken until a year later, when he met his future wife; for the only sort of woman worth while seemed to be the one who could be protected as Marjorie's husband had protected her. Samuel could not imagine his grass-widow, Mrs. De Ferriac, causing any very righteous blows on her own account.

His early thirties found him well on his feet. He was associated with old Peter Carhart, who was in those days a national figure. Carhart's physique was like a rough model for a statue of

Hercules, and his record was just as solid--a pile made for the pure joy of it, without cheap extortion or shady scandal. He had been a great friend of Samuel's father, but he watched the son for six years before taking him into his own office. Heaven knows how many things he controlled at that time--mines, railroads, banks, whole cities. Samuel was very close to him, knew his likes and dislikes, his prejudices, weaknesses and many strengths.

One day Carhart sent for Samuel and, closing the door of his inner office, offered him a chair and a cigar.

"Everything O. K., Samuel?" he asked.

"Why, yes."

"I've been afraid you're getting a bit stale."

"Stale?" Samuel was puzzled.

"You've done no work outside the office for nearly ten years?"

"But I've had vacations, in the Adiron---"

Carhart waved this aside.

"I mean outside work. Seeing the things move that we've always pulled the strings of here."

"No " admitted Samuel; "I haven't."

"So," he said abruptly "I'm going to give you an outside job that'll take about a month."

Samuel didn't argue. He rather liked the idea and he made up his mind that, whatever it was, he would put it through just as Carhart wanted it. That was his employer's greatest hobby, and the men around him were as dumb under direct orders as infantry

subalterns.

"You'll go to San Antonio and see Hamil," continued Carhart.
"He's got a job on hand and he wants a man to take charge."

Hamil was in charge of the Carhart interests in the Southwest, a man who had grown up in the shadow of his employer, and with whom, though they had never met, Samuel had had much official correspondence.

"When do I leave?"

"You'd better go to-morrow," answered Carhart, glancing at the calendar. "That's the 1st of May. I'll expect your report here on the 1st of June."

Next morning Samuel left for Chicago, and two days later he was facing Hamil across a table in the office of the Merchants' Trust in San Antonio. It didn't take long to get the gist of the thing. It was a big deal in oil which concerned the buying up of seventeen huge adjoining ranches. This buying up had to be done in one week, and it was a pure squeeze. Forces had been set in motion that put the seventeen owners between the devil and the deep sea, and Samuel's part was simply to "handle" the matter from a little village near Pueblo. With tact and efficiency the right man could bring it off without any friction, for it was merely a question of sitting at the wheel and keeping a firm hold. Hamil, with an astuteness many times valuable to his chief, had arranged a situation that would give a much greater clear gain than any dealing in the open market. Samuel shook hands with Hamil, arranged to return in two weeks, and left for San Felipe, New Mexico.

It occurred to him, of course, that Carhart was trying him out. Hamil's report on his handling of this might be a factor in something big for him, but even without that he would have done his best to put the thing through. Ten years in New York hadn't made him sentimental and he was quite accustomed to finish

everything he began--and a little bit more.

All went well at first. There was no enthusiasm, but each one of the seventeen ranchers concerned knew Samuel's business, knew what he had behind him, and that they had as little chance of holding out as flies on a window-pane. Some of them were resigned--some of them cared like the devil, but they'd talked it over, argued it with lawyers and couldn't see any possible loophole. Five of the ranches had oil, the other twelve were part of the chance, but quite as necessary to Hamil's purpose, in any event.

Samuel soon saw that the real leader was an early settler named McIntyre, a man of perhaps fifty, gray-haired, clean-shaven, bronzed by forty New Mexico summers, and with those clear steady eye that Texas and New Mexico weather are apt to give. His ranch had not as yet shown oil, but it was in the pool, and if any man hated to lose his land McIntyre did. Every one had rather looked to him at first to avert the big calamity, and he had hunted all over the territory for the legal means with which to do it, but he had failed, and he knew it. He avoided Samuel assiduously, but Samuel was sure that when the day came for the signatures he would appear.

It came--a baking May day, with hot wave rising off the parched land as far as eyes could see, and as Samuel sat stewing in his little improvised office--a few chairs, a bench, and a wooden table--he was glad the thing was almost over. He wanted to get back East the worst way, and join his wife and children for a week at the seashore.

The meeting was set for four o'clock, and he was rather surprised at three-thirty when the door opened and McIntyre came in. Samuel could not help respecting the man's attitude, and feeling a bit sorry for him. McIntyre seemed closely related to the prairies, and Samuel had the little flicker of envy that city people feel toward men who live in the open.

"Afternoon," said McIntyre, standing in the open doorway, with his feet apart and his hands on his hips.

"Hello, Mr. McIntyre." Samuel rose, but omitted the formality of offering his hand. He imagined the rancher cordially loathed him, and he hardly blamed him. McIntyre came in and sat down leisurely.

"You got us," he said suddenly.

This didn't seem to require any answer.

"When I heard Carhart was back of this," he continued, "I gave up."

"Mr. Carhart is---" began Samuel, but McIntyre waved him silent.

"Don't talk about the dirty sneak-thief!"

"Mr. McIntyre," said Samuel briskly, "if this half-hour is to be devoted to that sort of talk---"

"Oh, dry up, young man," McIntyre interrupted, "you can't abuse a man who'd do a thing like this."

Samuel made no answer.

"It's simply a dirty filch. There just ARE skunks like him too big to handle."

"You're being paid liberally," offered Samuel.

"Shut up!" roared McIntyre suddenly. "I want the privilege of talking." He walked to the door and looked out across the land, the sunny, steaming pasturage that began almost at his feet and ended with the gray-green of the distant mountains. When he turned around his mouth was trembling.

"Do you fellows love Wall Street?" he said hoarsely, "or

wherever you do your dirty scheming---" He paused. "I suppose you do. No critter gets so low that he doesn't sort of love the place he's worked, where he's sweated out the best he's had in him."

Samuel watched him awkwardly. McIntyre wiped his forehead with a huge blue handkerchief, and continued:

"I reckon this rotten old devil had to have another million. I reckon we're just a few of the poor he's blotted out to buy a couple more carriages or something." He waved his hand toward the door. "I built a house out there when I was seventeen, with these two hands. I took a wife there at twenty-one, added two wings, and with four mangy steers I started out. Forty summers I've saw the sun come up over those mountains and drop down red as blood in the evening, before the heat drifted off and the stars came out. I been happy in that house. My boy was born there and he died there, late one spring, in the hottest part of an afternoon like this. Then the wife and I lived there alone like we'd lived before, and sort of tried to have a home, after all, not a real home but nigh it--cause the boy always seemed around close, somehow, and we expected a lot of nights to see him runnin' up the path to supper." His voice was shaking so he could hardly speak and he turned again to the door, his gray eyes contracted.

"That's my land out there," he said, stretching out his arm, "my land, by God--- It's all I got in the world--and ever wanted." He dashed his sleeve across his face, and his tone changed as he turned slowly and faced Samuel. "But I suppose it's got to go when they want it--it's got to go."

Samuel had to talk. He felt that in a minute more he would lose his head. So he began, as level-voiced as he could--in the sort of tone he saved for disagreeable duties.

"It's business, Mr. McIntyre," he said. "It's inside the law. Perhaps we couldn't have bought out two or three of you at any

price, but most of you did have a price. Progress demands some things---"

Never had he felt so inadequate, and it was with the greatest relief that he heard hoof-beats a few hundred yards away.

But at his words the grief in McIntyre's eyes had changed to fury.

"You and your dirty gang of crooks!" he cried. "Not one of you has got an honest love for anything on God's earth! You're a herd of money-swine!"

Samuel rose and McIntyre took a step toward him.

"You long-winded dude. You got our land--take that for Peter Carhart!"

He swung from the shoulder quick as lightning and down went Samuel in a heap. Dimly he heard steps in the doorway and knew that some one was holding McIntyre, but there was no need. The rancher had sunk down in his chair, and dropped his head in his hands.

Samuel's brain was whirring. He realized that the fourth fist had hit him, and a great flood of emotion cried out that the law that had inexorably ruled his life was in motion again. In a half-daze he got up and strode from the room.

The next ten minutes were perhaps the hardest of his life. People talk of the courage of convictions, but in actual life a man's duty to his family may make a rigid corpse seem a selfish indulgence of his own righteousness. Samuel thought mostly of his family, yet he never really wavered. That jolt had brought him to.

When he came back in the room there were a log of worried faces waiting for him, but he didn't waste any time explaining.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Mr. McIntyre has been kind enough to convince me that in this matter you are absolutely right and the Peter Carhart interests absolutely wrong. As far as I am concerned you can keep your ranches to the rest of your days."

He pushed his way through an astounded gathering, and within a half-hour he had sent two telegrams that staggered the operator into complete unfitness for business; one was to Hamil in San Antonio; one was to Peter Carhart in New York.

Samuel didn't sleep much that night. He knew that for the first time in his business career he had made a dismal, miserable failure. But some instinct in him, stronger than will, deeper than training, had forced him to do what would probably end his ambitions and his happiness. But it was done and it never occurred to him that he could have acted otherwise.

Next morning two telegrams were waiting for him. The first was from Hamil. It contained three words:

"You blamed idiot!"

The second was from New York:

"Deal off come to New York immediately Carhart."

Within a week things had happened. Hamil quarrelled furiously and violently defended his scheme. He was summoned to New York and spent a bad half-hour on the carpet in Peter Carhart's office. He broke with the Carhart interests in July, and in August Samuel Meredith, at thirty-five years old, was, to all intents, made Carhart's partner. The fourth fist had done its work.

I suppose that there's a caddish streak in every man that runs crosswise across his character and disposition and general outlook. With some men it's secret and we never know it's there until they strike us in the dark one night. But Samuel's showed

when it was in action, and the sight of it made people see red. He was rather lucky in that, because every time his little devil came up it met a reception that sent it scurrying down below in a sickly, feeble condition. It was the same devil, the same streak that made him order Gilly's friends off the bed, that made him go inside Marjorie's house.

If you could run your hand along Samuel Meredith's jaw you'd feel a lump. He admits he's never been sure which fist left it there, but he wouldn't lose it for anything. He says there's no cad like an old cad, and that sometimes just before making a decision, it's a great help to stroke his chin. The reporters call it a nervous characteristic, but it's not that. It's so he can feel again the gorgeous clarity, the lightning sanity of those four fists.

TWO GENTLEMEN who were in the lavatory at the time tried to lift him up: but he was quite helpless. He lay curled up at the foot of the stairs down which he had fallen. They succeeded in turning him over. His hat had rolled a few yards away and his clothes were smeared with the filth and ooze of the floor on which he had lain, face downwards. His eyes were closed and he breathed with a grunting noise. A thin stream of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

These two gentlemen and one of the curates carried him up the stairs and laid him down again on the floor of the bar. In two minutes he was surrounded by a ring of men. The manager of the bar asked everyone who he was and who was with him. No one knew who he was but one of the curates said he had served the gentleman with a small rum.

"Was he by himself?" asked the manager.

"No, sir. There was two gentlemen with him."

"And where are they?"

No one knew; a voice said:

"Give him air. He's fainted."

The ring of onlookers distended and closed again elastically. A dark medal of blood had formed itself near the man's head on the tessellated floor. The manager, alarmed by the grey pallor of the man's face, sent for a policeman.

His collar was unfastened and his necktie undone. He opened eyes for an instant, sighed and closed them again. One of gentlemen who had carried him upstairs held a dinged silk hat in his hand. The manager asked repeatedly did no one know who the injured

man was or where had his friends gone. The door of the bar opened and an immense constable entered. A crowd which had followed him down the laneway collected outside the door, struggling to look in through the glass panels.

The manager at once began to narrate what he knew. The constable, a young man with thick immobile features, listened. He moved his head slowly to right and left and from the manager to the person on the floor, as if he feared to be the victim some delusion. Then he drew off his glove, produced a small book from his waist, licked the lead of his pencil and made ready to indite. He asked in a suspicious provincial accent:

"Who is the man? What's his name and address?"

A young man in a cycling-suit cleared his way through the ring of bystanders. He knelt down promptly beside the injured man and called for water. The constable knelt down also to help. The young man washed the blood from the injured man's mouth and then called for some brandy. The constable repeated the order in an authoritative voice until a curate came running with the glass. The brandy was forced down the man's throat. In a few seconds he opened his eyes and looked about him. He looked at the circle of faces and then, understanding, strove to rise to his feet.

"You're all right now?" asked the young man in the cycling-suit.

"Sha,'s nothing," said the injured man, trying to stand up.

He was helped to his feet. The manager said something about a hospital and some of the bystanders gave advice. The battered silk hat was placed on the man's head. The constable asked:

"Where do you live?"

The man, without answering, began to twirl the ends of his moustache. He made light of his accident. It was nothing, he said: only a little accident. He spoke very thickly.

"Where do you live" repeated the constable.

The man said they were to get a cab for him. While the point was being debated a tall agile gentleman of fair complexion, wearing a long yellow ulster, came from the far end of the bar. Seeing the spectacle, he called out:

"Hallo, Tom, old man! What's the trouble?"

"Sha,'s nothing," said the man.

The new-comer surveyed the deplorable figure before him and then turned to the constable, saying:

"It's all right, constable. I'll see him home."

The constable touched his helmet and answered:

"All right, Mr. Power!"

"Come now, Tom," said Mr. Power, taking his friend by the arm.

"No bones broken. What? Can you walk?"

The young man in the cycling-suit took the man by the other arm and the crowd divided.

"How did you get yourself into this mess?" asked Mr. Power.

"The gentleman fell down the stairs," said the young man.

"I 'ery 'uch o'liged to you, sir," said the injured man.

"Not at all."

"ant we have a little...?"

"Not now. Not now."

The three men left the bar and the crowd sifted through the doors in to the laneway. The manager brought the constable to the stairs to inspect the scene of the accident. They agreed that the gentleman must have missed his footing. The customers returned to the counter and a curate set about removing the traces of blood from the floor.

When they came out into Grafton Street, Mr. Power whistled for an outsider. The injured man said again as well as he could.

"I 'ery 'uch o'liged to you, sir. I hope we'll 'eet again. 'y na'e is Kernan."

The shock and the incipient pain had partly sobered him.

"Don't mention it," said the young man.

They shook hands. Mr. Kernan was hoisted on to the car and, while Mr. Power was giving directions to the carman, he expressed his gratitude to the young man and regretted that they could not have a little drink together.

"Another time," said the young man.

The car drove off towards Westmoreland Street. As it passed Ballast Office the clock showed half-past nine. A keen east wind hit them, blowing from the mouth of the river. Mr. Kernan was huddled together with cold. His friend asked him to tell how the accident had happened.

"I'an't 'an," he answered, "'y 'ongue is hurt."

"Show."

The other leaned over the well of the car and peered into Mr. Kernan's mouth but he could not see. He struck a match and, sheltering it in the shell of his hands, peered again into the mouth

which Mr. Kernan opened obediently. The swaying movement of the car brought the match to and from the opened mouth. The lower teeth and gums were covered with clotted blood and a minute piece of the tongue seemed to have been bitten off. The match was blown out.

"That's ugly," said Mr. Power.

"Sha, 's nothing," said Mr. Kernan, closing his mouth and pulling the collar of his filthy coat across his neck.

Mr. Kernan was a commercial traveller of the old school which believed in the dignity of its calling. He had never been seen in the city without a silk hat of some decency and a pair of gaiters. By grace of these two articles of clothing, he said, a man could always pass muster. He carried on the tradition of his Napoleon, the great Blackwhite, whose memory he evoked at times by legend and mimicry. Modern business methods had spared him only so far as to allow him a little office in Crowe Street, on the window blind of which was written the name of his firm with the address--London, E. C. On the mantelpiece of this little office a little leaden battalion of canisters was drawn up and on the table before the window stood four or five china bowls which were usually half full of a black liquid. From these bowls Mr. Kernan tasted tea. He took a mouthful, drew it up, saturated his palate with it and then spat it forth into the grate. Then he paused to judge.

Mr. Power, a much younger man, was employed in the Royal Irish Constabulary Office in Dublin Castle. The arc of his social rise intersected the arc of his friend's decline, but Mr. Kernan's decline was mitigated by the fact that certain of those friends who had known him at his highest point of success still esteemed him as a character. Mr. Power was one of these friends. His inexplicable debts were a byword in his circle; he was a debonair young man.

The car halted before a small house on the Glasnevin road and Mr. Kernan was helped into the house. His wife put him to bed while Mr. Power sat downstairs in the kitchen asking the children where

they went to school and what book they were in. The children-- two girls and a boy, conscious of their father helplessness and of their mother's absence, began some horseplay with him. He was surprised at their manners and at their accents, and his brow grew thoughtful. After a while Mrs. Kernan entered the kitchen, exclaiming:

"Such a sight! O, he'll do for himself one day and that's the holy alls of it. He's been drinking since Friday."

Mr. Power was careful to explain to her that he was not responsible, that he had come on the scene by the merest accident. Mrs. Kernan, remembering Mr. Power's good offices during domestic quarrels, as well as many small, but opportune loans, said:

"O, you needn't tell me that, Mr. Power. I know you're a friend of his, not like some of the others he does be with. They're all right so long as he has money in his pocket to keep him out from his wife and family. Nice friends! Who was he with tonight, I'd like to know?"

Mr. Power shook his head but said nothing.

"I'm so sorry," she continued, "that I've nothing in the house to offer you. But if you wait a minute I'll send round to Fogarty's, at the corner."

Mr. Power stood up.

"We were waiting for him to come home with the money. He never seems to think he has a home at all."

"O, now, Mrs. Kernan," said Mr. Power, "we'll make him turn over a new leaf. I'll talk to Martin. He's the man. We'll come here one of these nights and talk it over."

She saw him to the door. The carman was stamping up and down

the footpath, and swinging his arms to warm himself.

"It's very kind of you to bring him home," she said.

"Not at all," said Mr. Power.

He got up on the car. As it drove off he raised his hat to her gaily.

"We'll make a new man of him," he said. "Good-night, Mrs. Kernan."

Mrs. Kernan's puzzled eyes watched the car till it was out of sight. Then she withdrew them, went into the house and emptied her husband's pockets.

She was an active, practical woman of middle age. Not long before she had celebrated her silver wedding and renewed her intimacy with her husband by waltzing with him to Mr. Power's accompaniment. In her days of courtship, Mr. Kernan had seemed to her a not ungallant figure: and she still hurried to the chapel door whenever a wedding was reported and, seeing the bridal pair, recalled with vivid pleasure how she had passed out of the Star of the Sea Church in Sandymount, leaning on the arm of a jovial well-fed man, who was dressed smartly in a frock-coat and lavender trousers and carried a silk hat gracefully balanced upon his other arm. After three weeks she had found a wife's life irksome and, later on, when she was beginning to find it unbearable, she had become a mother. The part of mother presented to her no insuperable difficulties and for twenty-five years she had kept house shrewdly for her husband. Her two eldest sons were launched. One was in a draper's shop in Glasgow and the other was clerk to a tea-merchant in Belfast. They were good sons, wrote regularly and sometimes sent home money. The other children were still at school.

Mr. Kernan sent a letter to his office next day and remained in bed.

She made beef-tea for him and scolded him roundly. She accepted his frequent intemperance as part of the climate, healed him dutifully whenever he was sick and always tried to make him eat a breakfast. There were worse husbands. He had never been violent since the boys had grown up, and she knew that he would walk to the end of Thomas Street and back again to book even a small order.

Two nights after, his friends came to see him. She brought them up to his bedroom, the air of which was impregnated with a personal odour, and gave them chairs at the fire. Mr. Kernan's tongue, the occasional stinging pain of which had made him somewhat irritable during the day, became more polite. He sat propped up in the bed by pillows and the little colour in his puffy cheeks made them resemble warm cinders. He apologised to his guests for the disorder of the room, but at the same time looked at them a little proudly, with a veteran's pride.

He was quite unconscious that he was the victim of a plot which his friends, Mr. Cunningham, Mr. M'Coy and Mr. Power had disclosed to Mrs. Kernan in the parlour. The idea been Mr. Power's, but its development was entrusted to Mr. Cunningham. Mr. Kernan came of Protestant stock and, though he had been converted to the Catholic faith at the time of his marriage, he had not been in the pale of the Church for twenty years. He was fond, moreover, of giving side-thrusts at Catholicism.

Mr. Cunningham was the very man for such a case. He was an elder colleague of Mr. Power. His own domestic life was very happy. People had great sympathy with him, for it was known that he had married an unpresentable woman who was an incurable drunkard. He had set up house for her six times; and each time she had pawned the furniture on him.

Everyone had respect for poor Martin Cunningham. He was a thoroughly sensible man, influential and intelligent. His blade of human knowledge, natural astuteness particularised by long association with cases in the police courts, had been tempered by

brief immersions in the waters of general philosophy. He was well informed. His friends bowed to his opinions and considered that his face was like Shakespeare's.

When the plot had been disclosed to her, Mrs. Kernan had said:

"I leave it all in your hands, Mr. Cunningham."

After a quarter of a century of married life, she had very few illusions left. Religion for her was a habit, and she suspected that a man of her husband's age would not change greatly before death. She was tempted to see a curious appropriateness in his accident and, but that she did not wish to seem bloody-minded, would have told the gentlemen that Mr. Kernan's tongue would not suffer by being shortened. However, Mr. Cunningham was a capable man; and religion was religion. The scheme might do good and, at least, it could do no harm. Her beliefs were not extravagant. She believed steadily in the Sacred Heart as the most generally useful of all Catholic devotions and approved of the sacraments. Her faith was bounded by her kitchen, but, if she was put to it, she could believe also in the banshee and in the Holy Ghost.

The gentlemen began to talk of the accident. Mr. Cunningham said that he had once known a similar case. A man of seventy had bitten off a piece of his tongue during an epileptic fit and the tongue had filled in again, so that no one could see a trace of the bite.

"Well, I'm not seventy," said the invalid.

"God forbid," said Mr. Cunningham.

"It doesn't pain you now?" asked Mr. M'Coy.

Mr. M'Coy had been at one time a tenor of some reputation. His wife, who had been a soprano, still taught young children to play the piano at low terms. His line of life had not been the shortest distance between two points and for short periods he had been

driven to live by his wits. He had been a clerk in the Midland Railway, a canvasser for advertisements for The Irish Times and for The Freeman's Journal, a town traveller for a coal firm on commission, a private inquiry agent, a clerk in the office of the Sub-Sheriff, and he had recently become secretary to the City Coroner. His new office made him professionally interested in Mr. Kernan's case.

"Pain? Not much," answered Mr. Kernan. "But it's so sickening. I feel as if I wanted to retch off."

"That's the booze," said Mr. Cunningham firmly.

"No," said Mr. Kernan. "I think I caught cold on the car. There's something keeps coming into my throat, phlegm or----"

"Mucus." said Mr. M'Coy.

"It keeps coming like from down in my throat; sickening."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. M'Coy, "that's the thorax."

He looked at Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Power at the same time with an air of challenge. Mr. Cunningham nodded his head rapidly and Mr. Power said:

"Ah, well, all's well that ends well."

"I'm very much obliged to you, old man," said the invalid.

Mr. Power waved his hand.

"Those other two fellows I was with----"

"Who were you with?" asked Mr. Cunningham.

"A chap. I don't know his name. Damn it now, what's his name? Little chap with sandy hair...."

"And who else?"

"Harford."

"Hm," said Mr. Cunningham.

When Mr. Cunningham made that remark, people were silent. It was known that the speaker had secret sources of information. In this case the monosyllable had a moral intention. Mr. Harford sometimes formed one of a little detachment which left the city shortly after noon on Sunday with the purpose of arriving as soon as possible at some public-house on the outskirts of the city where its members duly qualified themselves as bona fide travellers. But his fellow-travellers had never consented to overlook his origin. He had begun life as an obscure financier by lending small sums of money to workmen at usurious interest. Later on he had become the partner of a very fat, short gentleman, Mr. Goldberg, in the Liffey Loan Bank. Though he had never embraced more than the Jewish ethical code, his fellow-Catholics, whenever they had smarted in person or by proxy under his exactions, spoke of him bitterly as an Irish Jew and an illiterate, and saw divine disapproval of usury made manifest through the person of his idiot son. At other times they remembered his good points.

"I wonder where did he go to," said Mr. Kernan.

He wished the details of the incident to remain vague. He wished his friends to think there had been some mistake, that Mr. Harford and he had missed each other. His friends, who knew quite well Mr. Harford's manners in drinking were silent. Mr. Power said again:

"All's well that ends well."

Mr. Kernan changed the subject at once.

"That was a decent young chap, that medical fellow," he said.

"Only for him----"

"O, only for him," said Mr. Power, "it might have been a case of seven days, without the option of a fine."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Kernan, trying to remember. "I remember now there was a policeman. Decent young fellow, he seemed. How did it happen at all?"

"It happened that you were peloothered, Tom," said Mr. Cunningham gravely.

"True bill," said Mr. Kernan, equally gravely.

"I suppose you squared the constable, Jack," said Mr. M'Coy.

Mr. Power did not relish the use of his Christian name. He was not straight-laced, but he could not forget that Mr. M'Coy had recently made a crusade in search of valises and portmanteaus to enable Mrs. M'Coy to fulfil imaginary engagements in the country. More than he resented the fact that he had been victimised he resented such low playing of the game. He answered the question, therefore, as if Mr. Kernan had asked it.

The narrative made Mr. Kernan indignant. He was keenly conscious of his citizenship, wished to live with his city on terms mutually honourable and resented any affront put upon him by those whom he called country bumpkins.

"Is this what we pay rates for?" he asked. "To feed and clothe these ignorant bostooms... and they're nothing else."

Mr. Cunningham laughed. He was a Castle official only during office hours.

"How could they be anything else, Tom?" he said.

He assumed a thick, provincial accent and said in a tone of

command:

"65, catch your cabbage!"

Everyone laughed. Mr. M'Coy, who wanted to enter the conversation by any door, pretended that he had never heard the story. Mr. Cunningham said:

"It is supposed--they say, you know--to take place in the depot where they get these thundering big country fellows, omadhauns, you know, to drill. The sergeant makes them stand in a row against the wall and hold up their plates."

He illustrated the story by grotesque gestures.

"At dinner, you know. Then he has a bloody big bowl of cabbage before him on the table and a bloody big spoon like a shovel. He takes up a wad of cabbage on the spoon and pegs it across the room and the poor devils have to try and catch it on their plates: 65, catch your cabbage."

Everyone laughed again: but Mr. Kernan was somewhat indignant still. He talked of writing a letter to the papers.

"These yahoos coming up here," he said, "think they can boss the people. I needn't tell you, Martin, what kind of men they are."

Mr. Cunningham gave a qualified assent.

"It's like everything else in this world," he said. "You get some bad ones and you get some good ones."

"O yes, you get some good ones, I admit," said Mr. Kernan, satisfied.

"It's better to have nothing to say to them," said Mr. M'Coy. "That's my opinion!"

Mrs. Kernan entered the room and, placing a tray on the table, said:

"Help yourselves, gentlemen."

Mr. Power stood up to officiate, offering her his chair. She declined it, saying she was ironing downstairs, and, after having exchanged a nod with Mr. Cunningham behind Mr. Power's back, prepared to leave the room. Her husband called out to her:

"And have you nothing for me, duckie?"

"O, you! The back of my hand to you!" said Mrs. Kernan tartly.

Her husband called after her:

"Nothing for poor little hubby!"

He assumed such a comical face and voice that the distribution of the bottles of stout took place amid general merriment.

The gentlemen drank from their glasses, set the glasses again on the table and paused. Then Mr. Cunningham turned towards Mr. Power and said casually:

"On Thursday night, you said, Jack "

"Thursday, yes," said Mr. Power.

"Righto!" said Mr. Cunningham promptly.

"We can meet in M'Auley's," said Mr. M'Coy. "That'll be the most convenient place."

"But we mustn't be late," said Mr. Power earnestly, "because it is sure to be crammed to the doors."

"We can meet at half-seven," said Mr. M'Coy.

"Righto!" said Mr. Cunningham.

"Half-seven at M'Auley's be it!"

There was a short silence. Mr. Kernan waited to see whether he would be taken into his friends' confidence. Then he asked:

"What's in the wind?"

"O, it's nothing," said Mr. Cunningham. "It's only a little matter that we're arranging about for Thursday."

"The opera, is it?" said Mr. Kernan.

"No, no," said Mr. Cunningham in an evasive tone, "it's just a little... spiritual matter."

"O," said Mr. Kernan.

There was silence again. Then Mr. Power said, point blank:

"To tell you the truth, Tom, we're going to make a retreat."

"Yes, that's it," said Mr. Cunningham, "Jack and I and M'Coy here --we're all going to wash the pot."

He uttered the metaphor with a certain homely energy and, encouraged by his own voice, proceeded:

"You see, we may as well all admit we're a nice collection of scoundrels, one and all. I say, one and all," he added with gruff charity and turning to Mr. Power. "Own up now!"

"I own up," said Mr. Power.

"And I own up," said Mr. M'Coy.

"So we're going to wash the pot together," said Mr. Cunningham.

A thought seemed to strike him. He turned suddenly to the invalid and said:

"D'ye know what, Tom, has just occurred to me? You might join in and we'd have a four-handed reel."

"Good idea," said Mr. Power. "The four of us together."

Mr. Kernan was silent. The proposal conveyed very little meaning to his mind, but, understanding that some spiritual agencies were about to concern themselves on his behalf, he thought he owed it to his dignity to show a stiff neck. He took no part in the conversation for a long while, but listened, with an air of calm enmity, while his friends discussed the Jesuits.

"I haven't such a bad opinion of the Jesuits," he said, intervening at length. "They're an educated order. I believe they mean well, too."

"They're the grandest order in the Church, Tom," said Mr. Cunningham, with enthusiasm. "The General of the Jesuits stands next to the Pope."

"There's no mistake about it," said Mr. M'Coy, "if you want a thing well done and no flies about, you go to a Jesuit. They're the boys who have influence. I'll tell you a case in point...."

"The Jesuits are a fine body of men," said Mr. Power.

"It's a curious thing," said Mr. Cunningham, "about the Jesuit Order. Every other order of the Church had to be reformed at some time or other but the Jesuit Order was never once reformed. It never fell away."

"Is that so?" asked Mr. M'Coy.

"That's a fact," said Mr. Cunningham. "That's history."

"Look at their church, too," said Mr. Power. "Look at the congregation they have."

"The Jesuits cater for the upper classes," said Mr. M'Coy.

"Of course," said Mr. Power.

"Yes," said Mr. Kernan. "That's why I have a feeling for them. It's some of those secular priests, ignorant, bumptious----"

"They're all good men," said Mr. Cunningham, "each in his own way. The Irish priesthood is honoured all the world over."

"O yes," said Mr. Power.

"Not like some of the other priesthods on the continent," said Mr. M'Coy, "unworthy of the name."

"Perhaps you're right," said Mr. Kernan, relenting.

"Of course I'm right," said Mr. Cunningham. "I haven't been in the world all this time and seen most sides of it without being a judge of character."

The gentlemen drank again, one following another's example. Mr. Kernan seemed to be weighing something in his mind. He was impressed. He had a high opinion of Mr. Cunningham as a judge of character and as a reader of faces. He asked for particulars.

"O, it's just a retreat, you know," said Mr. Cunningham. "Father Purdon is giving it. It's for business men, you know."

"He won't be too hard on us, Tom," said Mr. Power persuasively.

"Father Purdon? Father Purdon?" said the invalid.

"O, you must know him, Tom," said Mr. Cunningham stoutly.

"Fine, jolly fellow! He's a man of the world like ourselves."

"Ah,... yes. I think I know him. Rather red face; tall."

"That's the man."

"And tell me, Martin.... Is he a good preacher?"

"Munno.... It's not exactly a sermon, you know. It's just kind of a friendly talk, you know, in a common-sense way."

Mr. Kernan deliberated. Mr. M'Coy said:

"Father Tom Burke, that was the boy!"

"O, Father Tom Burke," said Mr. Cunningham, "that was a born orator. Did you ever hear him, Tom?"

"Did I ever hear him!" said the invalid, nettled. "Rather! I heard him...."

"And yet they say he wasn't much of a theologian," said Mr Cunningham.

"Is that so?" said Mr. M'Coy.

"O, of course, nothing wrong, you know. Only sometimes, they say, he didn't preach what was quite orthodox."

"Ah!... he was a splendid man," said Mr. M'Coy.

"I heard him once," Mr. Kernan continued. "I forget the subject of his discourse now. Crofton and I were in the back of the... pit, you know... the----"

"The body," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Yes, in the back near the door. I forget now what.... O yes, it was

on the Pope, the late Pope. I remember it well. Upon my word it was magnificent, the style of the oratory. And his voice! God! hadn't he a voice! The Prisoner of the Vatican, he called him. I remember Crofton saying to me when we came out----"

"But he's an Orangeman, Crofton, isn't he?" said Mr. Power.

"Course he is," said Mr. Kernan, "and a damned decent Orangeman too. We went into Butler's in Moore Street--faith, was genuinely moved, tell you the God's truth--and I remember well his very words. Kernan, he said, we worship at different altars, he said, but our belief is the same. Struck me as very well put."

"There's a good deal in that," said Mr. Power. "There used always be crowds of Protestants in the chapel where Father Tom was preaching."

"There's not much difference between us," said Mr. M'Coy.

"We both believe in----"

He hesitated for a moment.

"... in the Redeemer. Only they don't believe in the Pope and in the mother of God."

"But, of course," said Mr. Cunningham quietly and effectively, "our religion is the religion, the old, original faith."

"Not a doubt of it," said Mr. Kernan warmly.

Mrs. Kernan came to the door of the bedroom and announced:

"Here's a visitor for you!"

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Fogarty."

"O, come in! come in!"

A pale, oval face came forward into the light. The arch of its fair trailing moustache was repeated in the fair eyebrows looped above pleasantly astonished eyes. Mr. Fogarty was a modest grocer. He had failed in business in a licensed house in the city because his financial condition had constrained him to tie himself to second-class distillers and brewers. He had opened a small shop on Glasnevin Road where, he flattered himself, his manners would ingratiate him with the housewives of the district. He bore himself with a certain grace, complimented little children and spoke with a neat enunciation. He was not without culture.

Mr. Fogarty brought a gift with him, a half-pint of special whisky. He inquired politely for Mr. Kernan, placed his gift on the table and sat down with the company on equal terms. Mr. Kernan appreciated the gift all the more since he was aware that there was a small account for groceries unsettled between him and Mr. Fogarty. He said:

"I wouldn't doubt you, old man. Open that, Jack, will you?"

Mr. Power again officiated. Glasses were rinsed and five small measures of whisky were poured out. This new influence enlivened the conversation. Mr. Fogarty, sitting on a small area of the chair, was specially interested.

"Pope Leo XIII," said Mr. Cunningham, "was one of the lights of the age. His great idea, you know, was the union of the Latin and Greek Churches. That was the aim of his life."

"I often heard he was one of the most intellectual men in Europe," said Mr. Power. "I mean, apart from his being Pope."

"So he was," said Mr. Cunningham, "if not the most so. His motto, you know, as Pope, was Lux upon Lux--Light upon Light."

"No, no," said Mr. Fogarty eagerly. "I think you're wrong there. It was Lux in Tenebris, I think--Light in Darkness."

"O yes," said Mr. M'Coy, "Tenebrae."

"Allow me," said Mr. Cunningham positively, "it was Lux upon Lux. And Pius IX his predecessor's motto was Crux upon Crux--that is, Cross upon Cross--to show the difference between their two pontificates."

The inference was allowed. Mr. Cunningham continued.

"Pope Leo, you know, was a great scholar and a poet."

"He had a strong face," said Mr. Kernan.

"Yes," said Mr. Cunningham. "He wrote Latin poetry."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Fogarty.

Mr. M'Coy tasted his whisky contentedly and shook his head with a double intention, saying:

"That's no joke, I can tell you."

"We didn't learn that, Tom," said Mr. Power, following Mr. M'Coy's example, "when we went to the penny-a-week school."

"There was many a good man went to the penny-a-week school with a sod of turf under his oxter," said Mr. Kernan sententiously. "The old system was the best: plain honest education. None of your modern trumpery...."

"Quite right," said Mr. Power.

"No superfluities," said Mr. Fogarty.

He enunciated the word and then drank gravely.

"I remember reading," said Mr. Cunningham, "that one of Pope Leo's poems was on the invention of the photograph--in Latin, of course."

"On the photograph!" exclaimed Mr. Kernan.

"Yes," said Mr. Cunningham.

He also drank from his glass.

"Well, you know," said Mr. M'Coy, "isn't the photograph wonderful when you come to think of it?"

"O, of course," said Mr. Power, "great minds can see things."

"As the poet says: Great minds are very near to madness," said Mr. Fogarty.

Mr. Kernan seemed to be troubled in mind. He made an effort to recall the Protestant theology on some thorny points and in the end addressed Mr. Cunningham.

"Tell me, Martin," he said. "Weren't some of the popes--of course, not our present man, or his predecessor, but some of the old popes--not exactly ... you know... up to the knocker?"

There was a silence. Mr. Cunningham said

"O, of course, there were some bad lots... But the astonishing thing is this. Not one of them, not the biggest drunkard, not the most... out-and-out ruffian, not one of them ever preached ex cathedra a word of false doctrine. Now isn't that an astonishing thing?"

"That is," said Mr. Kernan.

"Yes, because when the Pope speaks ex cathedra," Mr. Fogarty explained, "he is infallible."

"Yes," said Mr. Cunningham.

"O, I know about the infallibility of the Pope. I remember I was younger then.... Or was it that----?"

Mr. Fogarty interrupted. He took up the bottle and helped the others to a little more. Mr. M'Coy, seeing that there was not enough to go round, pleaded that he had not finished his first measure. The others accepted under protest. The light music of whisky falling into glasses made an agreeable interlude.

"What's that you were saying, Tom?" asked Mr. M'Coy.

"Papal infallibility," said Mr. Cunningham, "that was the greatest scene in the whole history of the Church."

"How was that, Martin?" asked Mr. Power.

Mr. Cunningham held up two thick fingers.

"In the sacred college, you know, of cardinals and archbishops and bishops there were two men who held out against it while the others were all for it. The whole conclave except these two was unanimous. No! They wouldn't have it!"

"Ha!" said Mr. M'Coy.

"And they were a German cardinal by the name of Dolling... or Dowling... or----"

"Dowling was no German, and that's a sure five," said Mr. Power, laughing.

"Well, this great German cardinal, whatever his name was, was one; and the other was John MacHale."

"What?" cried Mr. Kernan. "Is it John of Tuam?"

"Are you sure of that now?" asked Mr. Fogarty dubiously. "I thought it was some Italian or American."

"John of Tuam," repeated Mr. Cunningham, "was the man."

He drank and the other gentlemen followed his lead. Then he resumed:

"There they were at it, all the cardinals and bishops and archbishops from all the ends of the earth and these two fighting dog and devil until at last the Pope himself stood up and declared infallibility a dogma of the Church ex cathedra. On the very moment John MacHale, who had been arguing and arguing against it, stood up and shouted out with the voice of a lion: 'Credo!'"

"I believe!" said Mr. Fogarty.

"Credo!" said Mr. Cunningham "That showed the faith he had. He submitted the moment the Pope spoke."

"And what about Dowling?" asked Mr. M'Coy.

"The German cardinal wouldn't submit. He left the church."

Mr. Cunningham's words had built up the vast image of the church in the minds of his hearers. His deep, raucous voice had thrilled them as it uttered the word of belief and submission. When Mrs. Kernan came into the room, drying her hands she came into a solemn company. She did not disturb the silence, but leaned over the rail at the foot of the bed.

"I once saw John MacHale," said Mr. Kernan, "and I'll never forget it as long as I live."

He turned towards his wife to be confirmed.

"I often told you that?"

Mrs. Kernan nodded.

"It was at the unveiling of Sir John Gray's statue. Edmund Dwyer Gray was speaking, blathering away, and here was this old fellow, crabbed-looking old chap, looking at him from under his bushy eyebrows."

Mr. Kernan knitted his brows and, lowering his head like an angry bull, glared at his wife.

"God!" he exclaimed, resuming his natural face, "I never saw such an eye in a man's head. It was as much as to say: I have you properly taped, my lad. He had an eye like a hawk."

"None of the Grays was any good," said Mr. Power.

There was a pause again. Mr. Power turned to Mrs. Kernan and said with abrupt joviality:

"Well, Mrs. Kernan, we're going to make your man here a good holy pious and God-fearing Roman Catholic."

He swept his arm round the company inclusively.

"We're all going to make a retreat together and confess our sins--and God knows we want it badly."

"I don't mind," said Mr. Kernan, smiling a little nervously.

Mrs. Kernan thought it would be wiser to conceal her satisfaction. So she said:

"I pity the poor priest that has to listen to your tale."

Mr. Kernan's expression changed.

"If he doesn't like it," he said bluntly, "he can... do the other thing."

I'll just tell him my little tale of woe. I'm not such a bad fellow----"

Mr. Cunningham intervened promptly.

"We'll all renounce the devil," he said, "together, not forgetting his works and pomps."

"Get behind me, Satan!" said Mr. Fogarty, laughing and looking at the others.

Mr. Power said nothing. He felt completely out-generalled. But a pleased expression flickered across his face.

"All we have to do," said Mr. Cunningham, "is to stand up with lighted candles in our hands and renew our baptismal vows."

"O, don't forget the candle, Tom," said Mr. M'Coy, "whatever you do."

"What?" said Mr. Kernan. "Must I have a candle?"

"O yes," said Mr. Cunningham.

"No, damn it all," said Mr. Kernan sensibly, "I draw the line there. I'll do the job right enough. I'll do the retreat business and confession, and... all that business. But... no candles! No, damn it all, I bar the candles!"

He shook his head with farcical gravity.

"Listen to that!" said his wife.

"I bar the candles," said Mr. Kernan, conscious of having created an effect on his audience and continuing to shake his head to and fro. "I bar the magic-lantern business."

Everyone laughed heartily.

"There's a nice Catholic for you!" said his wife.

"No candles!" repeated Mr. Kernan obdurately. "That's off!"

The transept of the Jesuit Church in Gardiner Street was almost full; and still at every moment gentlemen entered from the side door and, directed by the lay-brother, walked on tiptoe along the aisles until they found seating accommodation. The gentlemen were all well dressed and orderly. The light of the lamps of the church fell upon an assembly of black clothes and white collars, relieved here and there by tweeds, on dark mottled pillars of green marble and on lugubrious canvases. The gentlemen sat in the benches, having hitched their trousers slightly above their knees and laid their hats in security. They sat well back and gazed formally at the distant speck of red light which was suspended before the high altar.

In one of the benches near the pulpit sat Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Kernan. In the bench behind sat Mr. M'Coy alone: and in the bench behind him sat Mr. Power and Mr. Fogarty. Mr. M'Coy had tried unsuccessfully to find a place in the bench with the others, and, when the party had settled down in the form of a quincunx, he had tried unsuccessfully to make comic remarks. As these had not been well received, he had desisted. Even he was sensible of the decorous atmosphere and even he began to respond to the religious stimulus. In a whisper, Mr. Cunningham drew Mr. Kernan's attention to Mr. Harford, the moneylender, who sat some distance off, and to Mr. Fanning, the registration agent and mayor maker of the city, who was sitting immediately under the pulpit beside one of the newly elected councillors of the ward. To the right sat old Michael Grimes, the owner of three pawnbroker's shops, and Dan Hogan's nephew, who was up for the job in the Town Clerk's office. Farther in front sat Mr. Hendrick, the chief reporter of The

Freeman's Journal, and poor O'Carroll, an old friend of Mr. Kernan's, who had been at one time a considerable commercial figure. Gradually, as he recognised familiar faces, Mr. Kernan began to feel more at home. His hat, which had been rehabilitated by his wife, rested upon his knees. Once or twice he pulled down his cuffs with one hand while he held the brim of his hat lightly, but firmly, with the other hand.

A powerful-looking figure, the upper part of which was draped with a white surplice, was observed to be struggling into the pulpit. Simultaneously the congregation unsettled, produced handkerchiefs and knelt upon them with care. Mr. Kernan followed the general example. The priest's figure now stood upright in the pulpit, two-thirds of its bulk, crowned by a massive red face, appearing above the balustrade.

Father Purdon knelt down, turned towards the red speck of light and, covering his face with his hands, prayed. After an interval, he uncovered his face and rose. The congregation rose also and settled again on its benches. Mr. Kernan restored his hat to its original position on his knee and presented an attentive face to the preacher. The preacher turned back each wide sleeve of his surplice with an elaborate large gesture and slowly surveyed the array of faces. Then he said:

"For the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. Wherefore make unto yourselves friends out of the mammon of iniquity so that when you die they may receive you into everlasting dwellings."

Father Purdon developed the text with resonant assurance. It was one of the most difficult texts in all the Scriptures, he said, to interpret properly. It was a text which might seem to the casual observer at variance with the lofty morality elsewhere preached by Jesus Christ. But, he told his hearers, the text had seemed to him specially adapted for the guidance of those whose lot it was to lead the life of the world and who yet wished to lead that life not in the manner of worldlings. It was a text for business men and

professional men. Jesus Christ with His divine understanding of every cranny of our human nature, understood that all men were not called to the religious life, that by far the vast majority were forced to live in the world, and, to a certain extent, for the world: and in this sentence He designed to give them a word of counsel, setting before them as exemplars in the religious life those very worshippers of Mammon who were of all men the least solicitous in matters religious.

He told his hearers that he was there that evening for no terrifying, no extravagant purpose; but as a man of the world speaking to his fellow-men. He came to speak to business men and he would speak to them in a businesslike way. If he might use the metaphor, he said, he was their spiritual accountant; and he wished each and every one of his hearers to open his books, the books of his spiritual life, and see if they tallied accurately with conscience.

Jesus Christ was not a hard taskmaster. He understood our little failings, understood the weakness of our poor fallen nature, understood the temptations of this life. We might have had, we all had from time to time, our temptations: we might have, we all had, our failings. But one thing only, he said, he would ask of his hearers. And that was: to be straight and manly with God. If their accounts tallied in every point to say:

"Well, I have verified my accounts. I find all well."

But if, as might happen, there were some discrepancies, to admit the truth, to be frank and say like a man:

"Well, I have looked into my accounts. I find this wrong and this wrong. But, with God's grace, I will rectify this and this. I will set right my accounts."

THE GREAT HUNT by Carl Sandburg
from The Second Book of Modern Verse,
edited by Jessie B. Rittenhouse, Ebook #1166

I cannot tell you now;
When the wind's drive and whirl
Blow me along no longer,
And the wind's a whisper at last --
Maybe I'll tell you then --
some other time.

When the rose's flash to the sunset
Reels to the wrack and the twist,
And the rose is a red bygone,
When the face I love is going
And the gate to the end shall clang,
And it's no use to beckon or say, "So long" --
Maybe I'll tell you then --
some other time.

I never knew any more beautiful than you:
I have hunted you under my thoughts,
I have broken down under the wind
And into the roses looking for you.
I shall never find any
greater than you.

THE HOUR AND THE GHOST by Christina Rossetti
from Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems
EBook #16950

BRIDE

O love, love, hold me fast,
He draws me away from thee;
I cannot stem the blast,
Nor the cold strong sea:
Far away a light shines
Beyond the hills and pines;
It is lit for me.

BRIDEGROOM

I have thee close, my dear,
No terror can come near;
Only far off the northern light shines clear. 10

GHOST

Come with me, fair and false,
To our home, come home.
It is my voice that calls:
Once thou wast not afraid
When I woo'd, and said,
'Come, our nest is newly made'--
Now cross the tossing foam.

BRIDE

Hold me one moment longer,
He taunts me with the past,
His clutch is waxing stronger, 20
Hold me fast, hold me fast.
He draws me from thy heart,

And I cannot withhold:
He bids my spirit depart
With him into the cold:--
Oh bitter vows of old!

BRIDEGROOM

Lean on me, hide thine eyes:
Only ourselves, earth and skies,
Are present here: be wise.

GHOST

Lean on me, come away, 30
I will guide and steady:
Come, for I will not stay:
Come, for house and bed are ready.
Ah, sure bed and house,
For better and worse, for life and death:
Goal won with shortened breath:
Come, crown our vows.

BRIDE

One moment, one more word,
While my heart beats still,
While my breath is stirred 40
By my fainting will.
O friend forsake me not,
Forget not as I forgot:
But keep thy heart for me,
Keep thy faith true and bright;
Through the lone cold winter night
Perhaps I may come to thee.

BRIDEGROOM

Nay peace, my darling, peace:

Let these dreams and terrors cease:
Who spoke of death or change or aught but ease?

50

GHOST

O fair frail sin,
O poor harvest gathered in!
Thou shalt visit him again
To watch his heart grow cold;
To know the gnawing pain
I knew of old;
To see one much more fair
Fill up the vacant chair,
Fill his heart, his children bear:--
While thou and I together
In the outcast weather
Toss and howl and spin.

60

I WANT TO KNOW WHY, by Sherwood Anderson
Triumph of the Egg and Other Stories, Ebook #7048
[this story contains offensive language]

We got up at four in the morning, that first day in the east. On the evening before we had climbed off a freight train at the edge of town, and with the true instinct of Kentucky boys had found our way across town and to the race track and the stables at once. Then we knew we were all right. Hanley Turner right away found a nigger we knew. It was Bildad Johnson who in the winter works at Ed Becker's livery barn in our home town, Beckersville. Bildad is a good cook as almost all our niggers are and of course he, like everyone in our part of Kentucky who is anyone at all, likes the horses. In the spring Bildad begins to scratch around. A nigger from our country can flatter and wheedle anyone into letting him do most anything he wants. Bildad wheedles the stable men and the trainers from the horse farms in our country around Lexington. The trainers come into town in the evening to stand around and talk and maybe get into a poker game. Bildad gets in with them. He is always doing little favors and telling about things to eat, chicken browned in a pan, and how is the best way to cook sweet potatoes and corn bread. It makes your mouth water to hear him.

When the racing season comes on and the horses go to the races and there is all the talk on the streets in the evenings about the new colts, and everyone says when they are going over to Lexington or to the spring meeting at Churchill Downs or to Latonia, and the horsemen that have been down to New Orleans or maybe at the winter meeting at Havana in Cuba come home to spend a week before they start out again, at such a time when everything talked about in Beckersville is just horses and nothing else and the outfits start out and horse racing is in every breath of air you breathe, Bildad shows up with a job as cook for some outfit. Often when I think about it, his always going all season to the races and working in the livery barn in the winter where horses are and where men like to come and talk about horses, I wish I was a nigger. It's a foolish thing to say, but that's the way I am about being around horses, just crazy. I can't help it.

Well, I must tell you about what we did and let you in on what I'm talking about. Four of us boys from Beckersville, all whites and sons of men who live in Beckersville regular, made up our minds we were going to the races, not just to Lexington or Louisville, I don't mean, but to the big eastern track we were always hearing our Beckersville men talk about, to Saratoga. We were all pretty young then. I was just turned fifteen and I was the oldest of the four. It was my scheme.

I admit that and I talked the others into trying it. There was Hanley Turner and Henry Rieback and Tom Tumberton and myself. I had thirty-seven dollars I had earned during the winter working nights and Saturdays in Enoch Myer's grocery. Henry Rieback had eleven dollars and the others, Hanley and Tom had only a dollar or two each. We fixed it all up and laid low until the Kentucky spring meetings were over and some of our men, the sportiest ones, the ones we envied the most, had cut out--then we cut out too.

I won't tell you the trouble we had beating our way on freights and all. We went through Cleveland and Buffalo and other cities and saw Niagara Falls. We bought things there, souvenirs and spoons and cards and shells with pictures of the falls on them for our sisters and mothers, but thought we had better not send any of the things home. We didn't want to put the folks on our trail and maybe be nabbed.

We got into Saratoga as I said at night and went to the track. Bildad fed us up. He showed us a place to sleep in hay over a shed and promised to keep still. Niggers are all right about things like that. They won't squeal on you. Often a white man you might meet, when you had run away from home like that, might appear to be all right and give you a quarter or a half dollar or something, and then go right and give you away. White men will do that, but not a nigger. You can trust them. They are squarer with kids. I don't know why.

At the Saratoga meeting that year there were a lot of men from home. Dave Williams and Arthur Mulford and Jerry Myers and others. Then there was a lot from Louisville and Lexington Henry Rieback knew but I didn't. They were professional gamblers and Henry Rieback's father is one too. He is what is called a sheet writer and goes away most of the

year to tracks. In the winter when he is home in Beckersville he don't stay there much but goes away to cities and deals faro. He is a nice man and generous, is always sending Henry presents, a bicycle and a gold watch and a boy scout suit of clothes and things like that.

My own father is a lawyer. He's all right, but don't make much money and can't buy me things and anyway I'm getting so old now I don't expect it. He never said nothing to me against Henry, but Hanley Turner and Tom Tumberton's fathers did. They said to their boys that money so come by is no good and they didn't want their boys brought up to hear gamblers' talk and be thinking about such things and maybe embrace them.

That's all right and I guess the men know what they are talking about, but I don't see what it's got to do with Henry or with horses either. That's what I'm writing this story about. I'm puzzled. I'm getting to be a man and want to think straight and be O. K., and there's something I saw at the race meeting at the eastern track I can't figure out.

I can't help it, I'm crazy about thoroughbred horses. I've always been that way. When I was ten years old and saw I was growing to be big and couldn't be a rider I was so sorry I nearly died. Harry Hellinfinger in Beckersville, whose father is Postmaster, is grown up and too lazy to work, but likes to stand around in the street and get up jokes on boys like sending them to a hardware store for a gimlet to bore square holes and other jokes like that. He played one on me. He told me that if I would eat a half a cigar I would be stunted and not grow any more and maybe could be a rider. I did it. When father wasn't looking I took a cigar out of his pocket and gagged it down some way. It made me awful sick and the doctor had to be sent for, and then it did no good. I kept right on growing. It was a joke. When I told what I had done and why most fathers would have whipped me but mine didn't.

Well, I didn't get stunted and didn't die. It serves Harry Hellinfinger right. Then I made up my mind I would like to be a stable boy, but had to give that up too. Mostly niggers do that work and I knew father wouldn't let me go into it. No use to ask him.

If you've never been crazy about thoroughbreds it's because you've never been around where they are much and don't know any better. They're beautiful. There isn't anything so lovely and clean and full of spunk and honest and everything as some race horses. On the big horse farms that are all around our town Beckersville there are tracks and the horses run in the early morning. More than a thousand times I've got out of bed before daylight and walked two or three miles to the tracks. Mother wouldn't of let me go but father always says, "Let him alone." So I got some bread out of the bread box and some butter and jam, gobbled it and lit out.

At the tracks you sit on the fence with men, whites and niggers, and they chew tobacco and talk, and then the colts are brought out. It's early and the grass is covered with shiny dew and in another field a man is plowing and they are frying things in a shed where the track niggers sleep, and you know how a nigger can giggle and laugh and say things that make you laugh. A white man can't do it and some niggers can't but a track nigger can every time.

And so the colts are brought out and some are just galloped by stable boys, but almost every morning on a big track owned by a rich man who lives maybe in New York, there are always, nearly every morning, a few colts and some of the old race horses and geldings and mares that are cut loose.

It brings a lump up into my throat when a horse runs. I don't mean all horses but some. I can pick them nearly every time. It's in my blood like in the blood of race track niggers and trainers. Even when they just go slop-jogging along with a little nigger on their backs I can tell a winner. If my throat hurts and it's hard for me to swallow, that's him. He'll run like Sam Hill when you let him out. If he don't win every time it'll be a wonder and because they've got him in a pocket behind another or he was pulled or got off bad at the post or something. If I wanted to be a gambler like Henry Rieback's father I could get rich. I know I could and Henry says so too. All I would have to do is to wait 'til that hurt comes when I see a horse and then bet every cent. That's what I would do if I wanted to be a gambler, but I don't.

When you're at the tracks in the morning--not the race tracks but the training tracks around Beckersville--you don't see a horse, the kind I've been talking about, very often, but it's nice anyway. Any thoroughbred, that is sired right and out of a good mare and trained by a man that knows how, can run. If he couldn't what would he be there for and not pulling a plow?

Well, out of the stables they come and the boys are on their backs and it's lovely to be there. You hunch down on top of the fence and itch inside you. Over in the sheds the niggers giggle and sing. Bacon is being fried and coffee made. Everything smells lovely. Nothing smells better than coffee and manure and horses and niggers and bacon frying and pipes being smoked out of doors on a morning like that. It just gets you, that's what it does.

But about Saratoga. We was there six days and not a soul from home seen us and everything came off just as we wanted it to, fine weather and horses and races and all. We beat our way home and Bildad gave us a basket with fried chicken and bread and other eatables in, and I had eighteen dollars when we got back to Beckersville. Mother jawed and cried but Pop didn't say much. I told everything we done except one thing. I did and saw that alone. That's what I'm writing about. It got me upset. I think about it at night. Here it is.

At Saratoga we laid up nights in the hay in the shed Bildad had showed us and ate with the niggers early and at night when the race people had all gone away. The men from home stayed mostly in the grandstand and betting field, and didn't come out around the places where the horses are kept except to the paddocks just before a race when the horses are saddled. At Saratoga they don't have paddocks under an open shed as at Lexington and Churchill Downs and other tracks down in our country, but saddle the horses right out in an open place under trees on a lawn as smooth and nice as Banker Bohon's front yard here in Beckersville. It's lovely. The horses are sweaty and nervous and shine and the men come out and smoke cigars and look at them and the trainers are there and the owners, and your heart thumps so you can hardly breathe.

Then the bugle blows for post and the boys that ride come running out with their silk clothes on and you run to get a place by the fence with the niggers.

I always am wanting to be a trainer or owner, and at the risk of being seen and caught and sent home I went to the paddocks before every race. The other boys didn't but I did.

We got to Saratoga on a Friday and on Wednesday the next week the big Mullford Handicap was to be run. Middlestride was in it and Sunstreak. The weather was fine and the track fast. I couldn't sleep the night before.

What had happened was that both these horses are the kind it makes my throat hurt to see. Middlestride is long and looks awkward and is a gelding. He belongs to Joe Thompson, a little owner from home who only has a half dozen horses. The Mullford Handicap is for a mile and Middlestride can't untrack fast. He goes away slow and is always way back at the half, then he begins to run and if the race is a mile and a quarter he'll just eat up everything and get there.

Sunstreak is different. He is a stallion and nervous and belongs on the biggest farm we've got in our country, the Van Riddle place that belongs to Mr. Van Riddle of New York. Sunstreak is like a girl you think about sometimes but never see. He is hard all over and lovely too. When you look at his head you want to kiss him. He is trained by Jerry Tillford who knows me and has been good to me lots of times, lets me walk into a horse's stall to look at him close and other things. There isn't anything as sweet as that horse. He stands at the post quiet and not letting on, but he is just burning up inside. Then when the barrier goes up he is off like his name, Sunstreak. It makes you ache to see him. It hurts you. He just lays down and runs like a bird dog. There can't anything I ever see run like him except Middlestride when he gets untracked and stretches himself.

Geel! I ached to see that race and those two horses run, ached and dreaded it too. I didn't want to see either of our horses beaten. We

had never sent a pair like that to the races before. Old men in Beckersville said so and the niggers said so. It was a fact.

Before the race I went over to the paddocks to see. I looked a last look at Middlestride, who isn't such a much standing in a paddock that way, then I went to see Sunstreak.

It was his day. I knew when I see him. I forgot all about being seen myself and walked right up. All the men from Beckersville were there and no one noticed me except Jerry Tillford. He saw me and something happened. I'll tell you about that.

I was standing looking at that horse and aching. In some way, I can't tell how, I knew just how Sunstreak felt inside. He was quiet and letting the niggers rub his legs and Mr. Van Riddle himself put the saddle on, but he was just a raging torrent inside. He was like the water in the river at Niagara Falls just before its goes plunk down. That horse wasn't thinking about running. He don't have to think about that. He was just thinking about holding himself back 'til the time for the running came. I knew that. I could just in a way see right inside him. He was going to do some awful running and I knew it. He wasn't bragging or letting on much or prancing or making a fuss, but just waiting. I knew it and Jerry Tillford his trainer knew. I looked up and then that man and I looked into each other's eyes. Something happened to me. I guess I loved the man as much as I did the horse because he knew what I knew. Seemed to me there wasn't anything in the world but that man and the horse and me. I cried and Jerry Tillford had a shine in his eyes. Then I came away to the fence to wait for the race. The horse was better than me, more steadier, and now I know better than Jerry. He was the quietest and he had to do the running.

Sunstreak ran first of course and he busted the world's record for a mile. I've seen that if I never see anything more. Everything came out just as I expected. Middlestride got left at the post and was way back and closed up to be second, just as I knew he would. He'll get a world's record too some day. They can't skin the Beckersville country on horses.

I watched the race calm because I knew what would happen. I was sure. Hanley Turner and Henry Rieback and Tom Tumberton were all more excited than me.

A funny thing had happened to me. I was thinking about Jerry Tillford the trainer and how happy he was all through the race. I liked him that afternoon even more than I ever liked my own father. I almost forgot the horses thinking that way about him. It was because of what I had seen in his eyes as he stood in the paddocks beside Sunstreak before the race started. I knew he had been watching and working with Sunstreak since the horse was a baby colt, had taught him to run and be patient and when to let himself out and not to quit, never. I knew that for him it was like a mother seeing her child do something brave or wonderful. It was the first time I ever felt for a man like that.

After the race that night I cut out from Tom and Hanley and Henry. I wanted to be by myself and I wanted to be near Jerry Tillford if I could work it. Here is what happened.

The track in Saratoga is near the edge of town. It is all polished up and trees around, the evergreen kind, and grass and everything painted and nice. If you go past the track you get to a hard road made of asphalt for automobiles, and if you go along this for a few miles there is a road turns off to a little rummy-looking farm house set in a yard.

That night after the race I went along that road because I had seen Jerry and some other men go that way in an automobile. I didn't expect to find them. I walked for a ways and then sat down by a fence to think. It was the direction they went in. I wanted to be as near Jerry as I could. I felt close to him. Pretty soon I went up the side road--I don't know why--and came to the rummy farm house. I was just lonesome to see Jerry, like wanting to see your father at night when you are a young kid. Just then an automobile came along and turned in. Jerry was in it and Henry Rieback's father, and Arthur Bedford from home, and Dave Williams and two other men I didn't know. They got out of the car and went into the house, all but Henry Rieback's father who quarreled with them and said he wouldn't go. It was only about nine o'clock, but they were all drunk and the rummy looking farm house was a place for

bad women to stay in. That's what it was. I crept up along a fence and looked through a window and saw.

It's what give me the fantods. I can't make it out. The women in the house were all ugly mean-looking women, not nice to look at or be near. They were homely too, except one who was tall and looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him, but with a hard ugly mouth. She had red hair. I saw everything plain. I got up by an old rose bush by an open window and looked. The women had on loose dresses and sat around in chairs. The men came in and some sat on the women's laps. The place smelled rotten and there was rotten talk, the kind a kid hears around a livery stable in a town like Beckersville in the winter but don't ever expect to hear talked when there are women around. It was rotten. A nigger wouldn't go into such a place.

I looked at Jerry Tillford. I've told you how I had been feeling about him on account of his knowing what was going on inside of Sunstreak in the minute before he went to the post for the race in which he made a world's record.

Jerry bragged in that bad woman house as I know Sunstreak wouldn't never have bragged. He said that he made that horse, that it was him that won the race and made the record. He lied and bragged like a fool. I never heard such silly talk.

And then, what do you suppose he did! He looked at the woman in there, the one that was lean and hard-mouthed and looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him, and his eyes began to shine just as they did when he looked at me and at Sunstreak in the paddocks at the track in the afternoon. I stood there by the window--gee!--but I wished I hadn't gone away from the tracks, but had stayed with the boys and the niggers and the horses. The tall rotten looking woman was between us just as Sunstreak was in the paddocks in the afternoon.

Then, all of a sudden, I began to hate that man. I wanted to scream and rush in the room and kill him. I never had such a feeling before. I was so mad clean through that I cried and my fists were doubled up so my

finger nails cut my hands.

And Jerry's eyes kept shining and he waved back and forth, and then he went and kissed that woman and I crept away and went back to the tracks and to bed and didn't sleep hardly any, and then next day I got the other kids to start home with me and never told them anything I seen.

I been thinking about it ever since. I can't make it out. Spring has come again and I'm nearly sixteen and go to the tracks mornings same as always, and I see Sunstreak and Middlestride and a new colt named Strident I'll bet will lay them all out, but no one thinks so but me and two or three niggers.

But things are different. At the tracks the air don't taste as good or smell as good. It's because a man like Jerry Tillford, who knows what he does, could see a horse like Sunstreak run, and kiss a woman like that the same day. I can't make it out. Darn him, what did he want to do like that for? I keep thinking about it and it spoils looking at horses and smelling things and hearing niggers laugh and everything. Sometimes I'm so mad about it I want to fight someone. It gives me the fantods. What did he do it for? I want to know why.

JOHN HENRY IN A STREET CAR by Hugh McHugh
from The Wit and Humor of America, Volume I. EBook #18464

Throw me in the cellar and batten down the hatches.

I'm a wreck in the key of G flat.

I side-stepped in among a bunch of language-heavers yesterday and ever since I've been sitting on the ragged edge with my feet hanging over.

I was on my way down to Wall Street to help J. Pierpont Morgan buy a couple of railroads and all the world seemed as blithe and gay as a love clinch from Laura Jean Libbey's latest.

When I climbed into the cable-car I felt like a man who had mailed money to himself the night before.

I was aces.

And then somebody blew out my gas.

At the next corner two society flash-lights flopped in and sat next to me.

They had a lot of words they wanted to use and they started in.

The car stopped and two more of the 400's leading ladies jumped the hurdles and came down the aisle.

They sat on the other side of me.

In a minute they began to bite the dictionary.

Their efforts aroused the energies of three women who sat opposite me, and _they_ proceeded to beat the English language black and blue.

In a minute the air was so full of talk that the grip germs had to pull out on the platform and chew the conductor.

The next one to me on my left started in:

"Oh, yes; we discharged our cook day before yesterday, but there's another coming this evening, and so--"

Her friend broke away and was up and back to the center with this:

"I was coming down Broadway this morning and I saw Julia Marlowe's leading man. I'm sure it was him, because I saw the show once in Chicago and he has the loveliest eyes I ever looked at!"

I knew that that was my cue to walk out, kick the motorman in the knuckles, upset the car and send in a fire call, but I passed it up.

I just sat there and bit my nails like the heavy villain in one of Corse Payton's ten, twen, thir dramas.

That "loveliest eyes" speech had me groggy.

Whenever I hear a woman turn on that "loveliest eyes" gag about an actor I always feel that a swift slap from a wet dish-rag would look well on her back hair.

Then the bunch across the aisle got the flag.

"Well, you know," says the broad lady who paid for one seat and was compelled by Nature to use three, "you know there's only five in our family, and so I take just five slices of stale bread and have a bowl of water ready in which I've dropped a pinch of salt. Then I take a piece of butter about the size of a walnut, and thoroughly grease the bottom of a frying-pan; then beat five eggs to a froth, and--"

I'm hoping the conductor will come in and give us all a tip to take to the timber because the cops are going to pinch the room, but there's nothing doing.

One of the dames on my right finds her voice and passes it around:--

"Oh, I think it's a perfect fright! I always did detest electric blue, anyway. It is so unbecoming, and then--"

I've just decided that this lady ought to make up as a Swede servant girl and play the part, when her friend hooks in:

"Oh, yes; I think it will look perfectly sweet! It is a foulard in one of those new heliotrope tints, made with a crêpe de chine chemisette, with a second vest peeping out on either side of the front over an embroidered satin vest and cut in scallops on the edge, finished with a full ruche of white chiffon, and the sleeves are just too tight for any use, and the skirt is too long for any good, and I declare the lining is too sweet! and I just hate to wear it out on the street and get it soiled, and I was going to have it made with a tunic, and Mrs. Wigwag--that's my brother-in-law's first cousin--she had her's made to wear with guimpes--and they are so economical! and--"

Think of a guy having to ride four miles and get his forehead fanned all the while with talk about foulard and crêpe de chine and guimpes!

Wouldn't it lead you to a padded cell?

Say! I was down and out--no kidding!

I wanted to get up and fight the door-tender, but I couldn't.

One of the conversationalists was sitting on my overcoat.

I felt that if I got up and called my coat back to Papa she might lose the thread of her story, and the jar would be something frightful.

So I sat still and saved her life.

The one on my right must have been the Lady President of The Hammer Club.

She was talking about some other girl and she didn't do a thing to the absent one.

She said she was svelte.

I suppose that's Dago for a shine.

That's the way with some women. They can't come right out and call another woman a polish. They have to beat around the bush and chase their friends to the swamps by throwing things like "svelte" at them. Tush!

I tried to duck the foreign tattle on my right and by so doing I'm next to this on my left:

"Oh, yes; I think politics is just too lovely! I don't know whether I'd rather be a Democrat or a Republican, but I think--oh! just look at the hat that woman has on! Isn't that a fright? Wonder if she trimmed it herself. Of course she did; you can tell by--"

I'm gasping for breath when the broad lady across the aisle gets the floor:

"No, indeed! I didn't have Eliza vaccinated. Why, she's too small yet, and don't you know my sister's husband's brother's child was vaccinated, and she is younger than our Eliza, but I don't just care, I don't want--"

Then the sweet girlish thing on my left gave me the corkscrew jab.

It was the finish:

"Isn't that lovely? Well, as I was telling you, Charlie came last night and brought Mr. Storeclose with him. Mr. Storeclose is awfully nice. He plays the mandolin just too sweet for anything, and--"

Me!--to the oyster beds! No male impersonators garroting a mandolin--not

any in mine!

When I want to take a course in music I'll climb into a public library
and read how Baldy Sloane wrote the Tiger Lily with one hand tied behind
him and his feet on the piano.

So I fell off the car and crawled home to mother.

KAZUMA'S REVENGE by Algernon Bertram
from Tales of Old Japan, eBook #13015

It is a law that he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. In Japan, where there exists a large armed class over whom there is practically little or no control, party and clan broils, and single quarrels ending in bloodshed and death, are matters of daily occurrence; and it has been observed that Edinburgh in the olden time, when the clansmen, roistering through the streets at night, would pass from high words to deadly blows, is perhaps the best European parallel of modern Yedo or Kiôto.

It follows that of all his possessions the Samurai sets most store by his sword, his constant companion, his ally, defensive and offensive. The price of a sword by a famous maker reaches a high sum: a Japanese noble will sometimes be found girding on a sword, the blade of which unmounted is worth from six hundred to a thousand riyos, say from £200 to £300, and the mounting, rich in cunning metal work, will be of proportionate value. These swords are handed down as heirlooms from father to son, and become almost a part of the wearer's own self. Iyeyasu, the founder of the last dynasty of Shoguns, wrote in his Legacy,[15] a code of rules drawn up for the guidance of his successors and their advisers in the government, "The girded sword is the living soul of the Samurai. In the case of a Samurai forgetting his sword, act as is appointed: it may not be overlooked."

[Footnote 15: _The Legacy of Iyeyasu_, translated by F. Lowder. Yokohama, 1868. (Printed for private circulation.)]

The occupation of a swordsmith is an honourable profession, the members of which are men of gentle blood. In a country where trade is looked down upon as degrading, it is strange to find this single exception to the general rule. The traditions of the craft are many and curious. During the most critical moment of the forging of the sword, when the steel edge is being welded into the body of the iron blade, it is a custom which still obtains among old-fashioned armourers to put on the cap and robes worn by the Kugé, or nobles of the Mikado's court, and, closing the doors of the workshop, to labour

in secrecy and freedom from interruption, the half gloom adding to the mystery of the operation. Sometimes the occasion is even invested with a certain sanctity, a tasselled cord of straw, such as is hung before the shrines of the Kami, or native gods of Japan, being suspended between two bamboo poles in the forge, which for the nonce is converted into a holy altar.

At Osaka, I lived opposite to one Kusano Yoshiaki, a swordsmith, a most intelligent and amiable gentleman, who was famous throughout his neighbourhood for his good and charitable deeds. His idea was that, having been bred up to a calling which trades in life and death, he was bound, so far as in him lay, to atone for this by seeking to alleviate the suffering which is in the world; and he carried out his principle to the extent of impoverishing himself. No neighbour ever appealed to him in vain for help in tending the sick or burying the dead. No beggar or leper was ever turned from his door without receiving some mark of his bounty, whether in money or in kind. Nor was his scrupulous honesty less remarkable than his charity. While other smiths are in the habit of earning large sums of money by counterfeiting the marks of the famous makers of old, he was able to boast that he had never turned out a weapon which bore any other mark than his own. From his father and his forefathers he inherited his trade, which, in his turn, he will hand over to his son--a hard-working, honest, and sturdy man, the clank of whose hammer and anvil may be heard from daybreak to sundown.

The trenchant edge of the Japanese sword is notorious. It is said that the best blades will in the hands of an expert swordsman cut through the dead bodies of three men, laid one upon the other, at a blow. The swords of the Shogun used to be tried upon the corpses of executed criminals; the public headsman was entrusted with the duty, and for a "nose medicine," or bribe of two bus (about three shillings), would substitute the weapon of a private individual for that of his Lord. Dogs and beggars, lying helpless by the roadside, not unfrequently serve to test a ruffian's sword; but the executioner earns many a fee from those who wish to see how their blades will cut off a head.

The statesman who shall enact a law forbidding the carrying of this deadly weapon will indeed have deserved well of his country; but it will be a difficult task to undertake, and a dangerous one. I would not give much for that man's life. The hand of every swashbuckler in the empire would be against him. One day as we were talking over this and other kindred subjects, a friend of mine, a man of advanced and liberal views, wrote down his opinion, _more Japonico_, in a verse of poetry which ran as follows:--"I would that all the swords and dirks in the country might be collected in one place and molten down, and that, from the metal so produced, one huge sword might be forged, which, being the only blade left, should be the girded sword of Great Japan."

The following history is in more senses than one a "Tale of a Sword."

About two hundred and fifty years ago Ikéda Kunaishôyu was Lord of the Province of Inaba. Among his retainers were two gentlemen, named Watanabé Yukiyé and Kawai Matazayémon, who were bound together by strong ties of friendship, and were in the habit of frequently visiting at one another's houses. One day Yukiyé was sitting conversing with Matazayémon in the house of the latter, when, on a sudden, a sword that was lying in the raised part of the room caught his eye. As he saw it, he started and said--

"Pray tell me, how came you by that sword?"

"Well, as you know, when my Lord Ikéda followed my Lord Tokugawa Iyéyasu to fight at Nagakudé, my father went in his train; and it was at the battle of Nagakudé that he picked up this sword."

"My father went too, and was killed in the fight, and this sword, which was an heirloom in our family for many generations, was lost at that time. As it is of great value in my eyes, I do wish that, if you set no special store by it, you would have the great kindness to return it to me."

"That is a very easy matter, and no more than what one friend should do by another. Pray take it."

Upon this Yukiyé gratefully took the sword, and having carried it home put it carefully away.

At the beginning of the ensuing year Matazayémon fell sick and died, and Yukiyé, mourning bitterly for the loss of his good friend, and anxious to requite the favour which he had received in the matter of his father's sword, did many acts of kindness to the dead man's son--a young man twenty-two years of age, named Matagorô.

Now this Matagorô was a base-hearted cur, who had begrudged the sword that his father had given to Yukiyé, and complained publicly and often that Yukiyé had never made any present in return; and in this way Yukiyé got a bad name in my Lord's palace as a stingy and illiberal man.

But Yukiyé had a son, called Kazuma, a youth sixteen years of age, who served as one of the Prince's pages of honour. One evening, as he and one of his brother pages were talking together, the latter said--

"Matagorô is telling everybody that your father accepted a handsome sword from him and never made him any present in return, and people are beginning to gossip about it."

"Indeed," replied the other, "my father received that sword from Matagorô's father as a mark of friendship and good-will, and, considering that it would be an insult to send a present of money in return, thought to return the favour by acts of kindness towards Matagorô. I suppose it is money he wants."

When Kazuma's service was over, he returned home, and went to his father's room to tell him the report that was being spread in the palace, and begged him to send an ample present of money to Matagorô. Yukryé reflected for a while, and said--

"You are too young to understand the right line of conduct in such matters. Matagorô's father and myself were very close friends; so, seeing that he had ungrudgingly given me back the sword of my

ancestors, I, thinking to requite his kindness at his death, rendered important services to Matagorô. It would be easy to finish the matter by sending a present of money; but I had rather take the sword and return it than be under an obligation to this mean churl, who knows not the laws which regulate the intercourse and dealings of men of gentle blood."

So Yukiyé, in his anger, took the sword to Matagorô's house, and said to him--

"I have come to your house this night for no other purpose than to restore to you the sword which your father gave me;" and with this he placed the sword before Matagorô.

"Indeed," replied the other, "I trust that you will not pain me by returning a present which my father made you."

"Amongst men of gentle birth," said Yukiyé, laughing scornfully, "it is the custom to requite presents, in the first place by kindness, and afterwards by a suitable gift offered with a free heart. But it is no use talking to such as you, who are ignorant of the first principles of good breeding; so I have the honour to give you back the sword."

As Yukiyé went on bitterly to reprove Matagorô, the latter waxed very wroth, and, being a ruffian, would have killed Yukiyé on the spot; but he, old man as he was, was a skilful swordsman, so Matagorô, craven-like, determined to wait until he could attack him unawares. Little suspecting any treachery, Yukiyé started to return home, and Matagorô, under the pretence of attending him to the door, came behind him with his sword drawn and cut him in the shoulder. The older man, turning round, drew and defended himself; but having received a severe wound in the first instance, he fainted away from loss of blood, and Matagorô slew him.

The mother of Matagorô, startled by the noise, came out; and when she saw what had been done, she was afraid, and said--"Passionate man! what have you done? You are a murderer; and now your life will be forfeit. What terrible deed is this!"

"I have killed him now, and there's nothing to be done. Come, mother, before the matter becomes known, let us fly together from this house."

"I will follow you; do you go and seek out my Lord Abé Shirogorô, a chief among the Hatamotos,[16] who was my foster-child. You had better fly to him for protection, and remain in hiding."

[Footnote 16: _Hatamotos._ The Hatamotos were the feudatory nobles of the Shogun or Tycoon. The office of Taikun having been abolished, the Hatamotos no longer exist. For further information respecting them, see the note at the end of the story.]

So the old woman persuaded her son to make his escape, and sent him to the palace of Shirogorô.

Now it happened that at this time the Hatamotos had formed themselves into a league against the powerful Daimios; and Abé Shirogorô, with two other noblemen, named Kondô Noborinosuké and Midzuno Jiurozayémon, was at the head of the league. It followed, as a matter of course, that his forces were frequently recruited by vicious men, who had no means of gaining their living, and whom he received and entreated kindly without asking any questions as to their antecedents; how much the more then, on being applied to for an asylum by the son of his own foster-mother, did he willingly extend his patronage to him, and guarantee him against all danger. So he called a meeting of the principal Hatamotos, and introduced Matagorô to them, saying--"This man is a retainer of Ikéda Kunaishôyu, who, having cause of hatred against a man named Watanabé Yukiyé, has slain him, and has fled to me for protection; this man's mother suckled me when I was an infant, and, right or wrong, I will befriend him. If, therefore, Ikéda Kunaishôyu should send to require me to deliver him up, I trust that you will one and all put forth your strength and help me to defend him."

"Ay! that will we, with pleasure!" replied Kondô Noborinosuké. "We have for some time had cause to complain of the scorn with which the Daimios have treated us. Let Ikéda Kunaishôyu send to claim this man,

and we will show him the power of the Hatamotos."

All the other Hatamotos, with one accord, applauded this determination, and made ready their force for an armed resistance, should my Lord Kunaishôyu send to demand the surrender of Matagorô. But the latter remained as a welcome guest in the house of Abé Shirogorô.

Now when Watanabé Kazuma saw that, as the night advanced, his father Yukiyé did not return home, he became anxious, and went to the house of Matagorô to seek for him, and finding to his horror that he was murdered, fell upon the corpse and, embraced it, weeping. On a sudden, it flashed across him that this must assuredly be the handiwork of Matagorô; so he rushed furiously into the house, determined to kill his father's murderer upon the spot. But Matagorô had already fled, and he found only the mother, who was making her preparations for following her son to the house of Abé Shirogorô: so he bound the old woman, and searched all over the house for her son; but, seeing that his search was fruitless, he carried off the mother, and handed her over to one of the elders of the clan, at the same time laying information against Matagorô as his father's murderer. When the affair was reported to the Prince, he was very angry, and ordered that the old woman should remain bound and be cast into prison until the whereabouts of her son should be discovered. Then Kazuma buried his father's corpse with great pomp, and the widow and the orphan mourned over their loss.

It soon became known amongst the people of Abé Shirogorô that the mother of Matagorô had been imprisoned for her son's crime, and they immediately set about planning her rescue; so they sent to the palace of my Lord Kunaishôyu a messenger, who, when he was introduced to the councillor of the Prince, said--

"We have heard that, in consequence of the murder of Yukiyé, my lord has been pleased to imprison the mother of Matagorô. Our master Shirogorô has arrested the criminal, and will deliver him up to you. But the mother has committed no crime, so we pray that she may be released from a cruel imprisonment: she was the foster-mother of our

master, and he would fain intercede to save her life. Should you consent to this, we, on our side, will give up the murderer, and hand him over to you in front of our master's gate to-morrow."

The councillor repeated this message to the Prince, who, in his pleasure at being able to give Kazuma his revenge on the morrow, immediately agreed to the proposal, and the messenger returned triumphant at the success of the scheme. On the following day, the Prince ordered the mother of Matagorô to be placed in a litter and carried to the Hatamoto's dwelling, in charge of a retainer named Sasawo Danyémon, who, when he arrived at the door of Abé Shirogorô's house, said--

"I am charged to hand over to you the mother of Matagorô, and, in exchange, I am authorized to receive her son at your hands."

"We will immediately give him up to you; but, as the mother and son are now about to bid an eternal farewell to one another, we beg you to be so kind as to tarry a little."

With this the retainers of Shirogorô led the old woman inside their master's house, and Sasawo Danyémon remained waiting outside, until at last he grew impatient, and ventured to hurry on the people within.

"We return you many thanks," replied they, "for your kindness in bringing us the mother; but, as the son cannot go with you at present, you had better return home as quickly as possible. We are afraid we have put you to much trouble." And so they mocked him.

When Danyémon saw that he had not only been cheated into giving up the old woman, but was being made a laughing-stock of into the bargain, he flew into a great rage, and thought to break into the house and seize Matagorô and his mother by force; but, peeping into the courtyard, he saw that it was filled with Hatamotos, carrying guns and naked swords. Not caring then to die fighting a hopeless battle, and at the same time feeling that, after having been so cheated, he would be put to shame before his lord, Sasawo Danyémon went to the burial-place of his ancestors, and disembowelled himself in front of their graves.

When the Prince heard how his messenger had been treated, he was indignant, and summoning his councillors resolved, although he was suffering from sickness, to collect his retainers and attack Abé Shirogorô; and the other chief Daimios, when the matter became publicly known, took up the cause, and determined that the Hatamotos must be chastised for their insolence. On their side, the Hatamotos put forth all their efforts to resist the Daimios. So Yedo became disturbed, and the riotous state of the city caused great anxiety to the Government, who took counsel together how they might restore peace. As the Hatamotos were directly under the orders of the Shogun, it was no difficult matter to put them down: the hard question to solve was how to put a restraint upon the great Daimios. However, one of the Gorôjin,[17] named Matsudaira Idzu no Kami, a man of great intelligence, hit upon a plan by which he might secure this end.

[Footnote 17: The first Council of the Shogun's ministers; literally, "assembly of imperial elders."]

There was at this time in the service of the Shogun a physician, named Nakarai Tsusen, who was in the habit of frequenting the palace of my Lord Kunaishôyu, and who for some time past had been treating him for the disease from which he was suffering. Idzu no Kami sent secretly for this physician, and, summoning him to his private room, engaged him in conversation, in the midst of which he suddenly dropped his voice and said to him in a whisper--

"Listen, Tsusen. You have received great favours at the hands of the Shogun. The Government is now sorely straitened: are you willing to carry your loyalty so far as to lay down your life on its behalf?"

"Ay, my lord; for generations my forefathers have held their property by the grace of the Shogun. I am willing this night to lay down my life for my Prince, as a faithful vassal should."

"Well, then, I will tell you. The great Daimios and the Hatamotos have fallen out about this affair of Matagorô, and lately it has seemed as if they meant to come to blows. The country will be

agitated, and the farmers and townsfolk suffer great misery, if we cannot quell the tumult. The Hatamotos will be easily kept under, but it will be no light task to pacify the great Daimios. If you are willing to lay down your life in carrying out a stratagem of mine, peace will be restored to the country; but your loyalty will be your death."

"I am ready to sacrifice my life in this service."

"This is my plan. You have been attending my Lord Kunaishôyu in his sickness; to-morrow you must go to see him, and put poison in his physic. If we can kill him, the agitation will cease. This is the service which I ask of you."

Tsusen agreed to undertake the deed; and on the following day, when he went to see Kunaishôyu, he carried with him poisoned drugs. Half the draught he drank himself,[18] and thus put the Prince off his guard, so that he swallowed the remainder fearlessly. Tsusen, seeing this, hurried away, and as he was carried home in his litter the death-agony seized him, and he died, vomiting blood.

[Footnote 18: A physician attending a personage of exalted rank has always to drink half the potion he prescribes as a test of his good faith.]

My Lord Kunaishôyu died in the same way in great torture, and in the confusion attending upon his death and funeral ceremonies the struggle which was impending with the Hatamotos was delayed.

In the meanwhile the Gorôjiu Idzu no Kami summoned the three leaders of the Hatamotos and addressed them as follows--

"The secret plottings and treasonable, turbulent conduct of you three men, so unbecoming your position as Hatamotos, have enraged my lord the Shogun to such a degree, that he has been pleased to order that you be imprisoned in a temple, and that your patrimony be given over to your next heirs."

Accordingly the three Hatamotos, after having been severely admonished, were confined in a temple called Kanyeiji; and the remaining Hatamotos, scared by this example, dispersed in peace. As for the great Daimios, inasmuch as after the death of my Lord Kunaishōyu the Hatamotos were all dispersed, there was no enemy left for them to fight with; so the tumult was quelled, and peace was restored.

Thus it happened that Matagorō lost his patron; so, taking his mother with him, he went and placed himself under the protection of an old man named Sakurai Jūzayémon. This old man was a famous teacher of lance exercise, and enjoyed both wealth and honour; so he took in Matagorō, and having engaged as a guard thirty Rōnins, all resolute fellows and well skilled in the arts of war, they all fled together to a distant place called Sagara.

All this time Watanabé Kazuma had been brooding over his father's death, and thinking how he should be revenged upon the murderer; so when my Lord Kunaishōyu suddenly died, he went to the young Prince who succeeded him and obtained leave of absence to go and seek out his father's enemy. Now Kazuma's elder sister was married to a man named Araki Matayémon, who at that time was famous as the first swordsman in Japan. As Kazuma was but sixteen years of age, this Matayémon, taking into consideration his near relationship as son-in-law to the murdered man, determined to go forth with the lad, as his guardian, and help him to seek out Matagorō; and two of Matayémon's retainers, named Ishidomé Busuké and Ikezoyé Magohachi, made up their minds, at all hazards, to follow their master. The latter, when he heard their intention, thanked them, but refused the offer, saying that as he was now about to engage in a vendetta in which his life would be continually in jeopardy, and as it would be a lasting grief to him should either of them receive a wound in such a service, he must beg them to renounce their intention; but they answered--

"Master, this is a cruel speech of yours. All these years have we received nought but kindness and favours at your hands; and now that you are engaged in the pursuit of this murderer, we desire to follow

you, and, if needs must, to lay down our lives in your service. Furthermore, we have heard that the friends of this Matagorô are no fewer than thirty-six men; so, however bravely you may fight, you will be in peril from the superior numbers of your enemy. However, if you are pleased to persist in your refusal to take us, we have made up our minds that there is no resource for us but to disembowel ourselves on the spot."

When Matayémon and Kazuma heard these words, they wondered at these faithful and brave men, and were moved to tears. Then Matayémon said--

"The kindness of you two brave fellows is without precedent. Well, then, I will accept your services gratefully."

Then the two men, having obtained their wish, cheerfully followed their master; and the four set out together upon their journey to seek out Matagorô, of whose whereabouts they were completely ignorant.

Matagorô in the meanwhile had made his way, with the old man Sakurai Jiuzayémon and his thirty Rônins, to Osaka. But, strong as they were in numbers, they travelled in great secrecy. The reason for this was that the old man's younger brother, Sakurai Jinsuké, a fencing-master by profession, had once had a fencing-match with Matayémon, Kazuma's brother-in-law, and had been shamefully beaten; so that the party were greatly afraid of Matayémon, and felt that, since he was taking up Kazuma's cause and acting as his guardian, they might be worsted in spite of their numbers: so they went on their way with great caution, and, having reached Osaka, put up at an inn in a quarter called Ikutama, and hid from Kazuma and Matayémon.

The latter also in good time reached Osaka, and spared no pains to seek out Matagorô. One evening towards dusk, as Matayémon was walking in the quarter where the enemy were staying, he saw a man, dressed as a gentleman's servant, enter a cook-shop and order some buckwheat porridge for thirty-six men, and looking attentively at the man, he recognized him as the servant of Sakurai Jiuzayémon; so he hid himself in a dark place and watched, and heard the fellow say--

"My master, Sakurai Jiuzayémon, is about to start for Sagara to-morrow morning, to return thanks to the gods for his recovery from a sickness from which he has been suffering; so I am in a great hurry."

With these words the servant hastened away; and Matayémon, entering the shop, called for some porridge, and as he ate it, made some inquiries as to the man who had just given so large an order for buckwheat porridge. The master of the shop answered that he was the attendant of a party of thirty-six gentlemen who were staying at such and such an inn. Then Matayémon, having found out all that he wanted to know, went home and told Kazuma, who was delighted at the prospect of carrying his revenge into execution on the morrow. That same evening Matayémon sent one of his two faithful retainers as a spy to the inn, to find out at what hour Matagorô was to set out on the following morning; and he ascertained from the servants of the inn, that the party was to start at daybreak for Sagara, stopping at Isé to worship at the shrine of Terashô Daijin.[19]

[Footnote 19: Goddess of the sun, and ancestress of the Mikados.]

Matayémon made his preparations accordingly, and, with Kazuma and his two retainers, started before dawn. Beyond Uyéno, in the province of Iga, the castle-town of the Daimio Tôdô Idzumi no Kami, there is a wide and lonely moor; and this was the place upon which they fixed for the attack upon the enemy. When they had arrived at the spot, Matayémon went into a tea-house by the roadside, and wrote a petition to the governor of the Daimio's castle-town for permission to carry out the vendetta within its precincts;[20] then he addressed Kazuma, and said--

"When we fall in with Matagorô and begin the fight, do you engage and slay your father's murderer; attack him and him only, and I will keep off his guard of Rônins;" then turning to his two retainers, "As for you, keep close to Kazuma; and should the Rônins attempt to rescue Matagorô, it will be your duty to prevent them, and succour Kazuma." And having further laid down each man's duties with great minuteness, they lay in wait for the arrival of the enemy. Whilst they were resting in the tea-house, the governor of the castle-town arrived,

and, asking for Matayémou, said--

"I have the honour to be the governor of the castle-town of Tôdô Idzumi no Kami. My lord, having learnt your intention of slaying your enemy within the precincts of his citadel, gives his consent; and as a proof of his admiration of your fidelity and valour, he has further sent you a detachment of infantry, one hundred strong, to guard the place; so that should any of the thirty-six men attempt to escape, you may set your mind at ease, for flight will be impossible."

[Footnote 20: "In respect to revenging injury done to master or father, it is granted by the wise and virtuous (Confucius) that you and the injurer cannot live together under the canopy of heaven.

"A person harbouring such vengeance shall notify the same in writing to the Criminal Court; and although no check or hindrance may be offered to his carrying out his desire within the period allowed for that purpose, it is forbidden that the chastisement of an enemy be attended with riot.

"Fellows who neglect to give notice of their intended revenge are like wolves of pretext, and their punishment or pardon should depend upon the circumstances of the case."--_Legacy of Iyéyasu_, ut suprâ.]

When Matayémon and Kazuma had expressed their thanks for his lordship's gracious kindness, the governor took his leave and returned home. At last the enemy's train was seen in the distance. First came Sakurai Jiuzayémon and his younger brother Jinsuké; and next to them followed Kawai Matagorô and Takénouchi Gentan. These four men, who were the bravest and the foremost of the band of Rônins, were riding on pack-horses, and the remainder were marching on foot, keeping close together.

As they drew near, Kazuma, who was impatient to avenge his father, stepped boldly forward and shouted in a loud voice--

"Here stand I, Kazuma, the son of Yukiyé, whom you, Matagorô, treacherously slew, determined to avenge my father's death. Come

forth, then, and do battle with me, and let us see which of us twain is the better man."

And before the Rônins had recovered from their astonishment, Matayémon said--

"I, Araké Matayémon, the son-in-law of Yukiyé, have come to second Kazuma in his deed of vengeance. Win or lose, you must give us battle."

When the thirty-six men heard the name of Matayémon, they were greatly afraid; but Sakurai Jiuzayémon urged them to be upon their guard, and leaped from his horse; and Matayémon, springing forward with his drawn sword, cleft him from the shoulder to the nipple of his breast, so that he fell dead. Sakurai Jinsuké, seeing his brother killed before his eyes, grew furious, and shot an arrow at Matayémon, who deftly cut the shaft in two with his dirk as it flew; and Jinsuké, amazed at this feat, threw away his bow and attacked Matayémon, who, with his sword in his right hand and his dirk in his left, fought with desperation. The other Rônins attempted to rescue Jinsuké, and, in the struggle, Kazuma, who had engaged Matagorô, became separated from Matayémon, whose two retainers, Busuké and Magohachi, bearing in mind their master's orders, killed five Rônins who had attacked Kazuma, but were themselves badly wounded. In the meantime, Matayémon, who had killed seven of the Rônins, and who the harder he was pressed the more bravely he fought, soon cut down three more, and the remainder dared not approach him. At this moment there came up one Kanô Tozayémon, a retainer of the lord of the castle-town, and an old friend of Matayémon, who, when he heard that Matayémon was this day about to avenge his father-in-law, had seized his spear and set out, for the sake of the good-will between them, to help him, and act as his second, and said--

"Sir Matayémon, hearing of the perilous adventure in which you have engaged, I have come out to offer myself as your second."

Matayémon, hearing this, was rejoiced, and fought with renewed vigour. Then one of the Rônins, named Takénouchi Gentan, a very brave man,

leaving his companions to do battle with Matayémon, came to the rescue of Matagorô, who was being hotly pressed by Kazuma, and, in attempting to prevent this, Busuké fell covered with wounds. His companion Magohachi, seeing him fall, was in great anxiety; for should any harm happen to Kazuma, what excuse could he make to Matayémon? So, wounded as he was, he too engaged Takénouchi Gentan, and, being crippled by the gashes he had received, was in deadly peril. Then the man who had come up from the castle-town to act as Matayémon's second cried out--

"See there, Sir Matayémon, your follower who is fighting with Gentan is in great danger. Do you go to his rescue, and second Sir Kazuma: I will give an account of the others!"

"Great thanks to you, sir. I will go and second Kazuma."

So Matayémon went to help Kazuma, whilst his second and the infantry soldiers kept back the surviving Rônins, who, already wearied by their fight with Matayémon, were unfit for any further exertion. Kazuma meanwhile was still fighting with Matagorô, and the issue of the conflict was doubtful; and Takénouchi Gentan, in his attempt to rescue Matagorô, was being kept at bay by Magohachi, who, weakened by his wounds, and blinded by the blood which was streaming into his eyes from a cut in the forehead, had given himself up for lost when Matayémon came and cried--

"Be of good cheer, Magohachi; it is I, Matayémon, who have come to the rescue. You are badly hurt; get out of harm's way, and rest yourself."

Then Magohachi, who until then had been kept up by his anxiety for Kazuma's safety, gave in, and fell fainting from loss of blood; and Matayémon worsted and slew Gentan; and even then, although he had received two wounds, he was not exhausted, but drew near to Kazuma and said--

"Courage, Kazuma! The Rônins are all killed, and there now remains only Matagorô, your father's murderer. Fight and win!"

The youth, thus encouraged, redoubled his efforts; but Matagorô,

losing heart, quailed and fell. So Kazuma's vengeance was fulfilled, and the desire of his heart was accomplished.

The two faithful retainers, who had died in their loyalty, were buried with great ceremony, and Kazuma carried the head of Matagorô and piously laid it upon his father's tomb.

So ends the tale of Kazuma's revenge.

I fear that stories of which killing and bloodshed form the principal features can hardly enlist much sympathy in these peaceful days. Still, when such tales are based upon history, they are interesting to students of social phenomena. The story of Kazuma's revenge is mixed up with events which at the present time are peculiarly significant: I mean the feud between the great Daimios and the Hatamotos. Those who have followed the modern history of Japan will see that the recent struggle, which has ended in the ruin of the Tycoon's power and the abolition of his office, was the outburst of a hidden fire which had been smouldering for centuries. But the repressive might had been gradually weakened, and contact with Western powers had rendered still more odious a feudality which men felt to be out of date. The revolution which has ended in the triumph of the Daimios over the Tycoon, is also the triumph of the vassal over his feudal lord, and is the harbinger of political life to the people at large. In the time of Iyêyasu the burden might be hateful, but it had to be borne; and so it would have been to this day, had not circumstances from without broken the spell. The Japanese Daimio, in advocating the isolation of his country, was hugging the very yoke which he hated. Strange to say, however, there are still men who, while they embrace the new political creed, yet praise the past, and look back with regret upon the day when Japan stood alone, without part or share in the great family of nations.

NOTE.--_Hatamoto_. This word means "_under the flag_." The Hatamotos were men who, as their name implied, rallied round the standard of the Shogun, or Tycoon, in war-time. They were eighty thousand in number. When Iyêyasu left the Province of Mikawa and became Shogun, the retainers whom he ennobled, and who received from him grants of land

yielding revenue to the amount of ten thousand kokus of rice a year, and from that down to one hundred kokus, were called _Hatamoto_. In return for these grants of land, the Hatamotos had in war-time to furnish a contingent of soldiers in proportion to their revenue. For every thousand kokus of rice five men were required. Those Hatamotos whose revenue fell short of a thousand kokus substituted a quota of money. In time of peace most of the minor offices of the Tycoon's government were filled by Hatamotos, the more important places being held by the Fudai, or vassal Daimios of the Shogun. Seven years ago, in imitation of the customs of foreign nations, a standing army was founded; and then the Hatamotos had to contribute their quota of men or of money, whether the country were at peace or at war. When the Shogun was reduced in 1868 to the rank of a simple Daimio, his revenue of eight million kokus reverted to the Government, with the exception of seven hundred thousand kokus. The title of Hatamoto exists no more, and those who until a few months ago held the rank are for the most part ruined or dispersed. From having been perhaps the proudest and most overbearing class in Japan, they are driven to the utmost straits of poverty. Some have gone into trade, with the heirlooms of their families as their stock; others are wandering through the country as Rôlins; while a small minority have been allowed to follow the fallen fortunes of their master's family, the present chief of which is known as the Prince of Tokugawa. Thus are the eighty thousand dispersed.

The koku of rice, in which all revenue is calculated, is of varying value. At the cheapest it is worth rather more than a pound sterling, and sometimes almost three times as much. The salaries of officials being paid in rice, it follows that there is a large and influential class throughout the country who are interested in keeping up the price of the staple article of food. Hence the opposition with which a free trade in rice has met, even in famine times. Hence also the frequent so-called "Rice Riots."

The amounts at which the lands formerly held by the chief Daimios, but now patriotically given up by them to the Mikado, were assessed, sound fabulous. The Prince of Kaga alone had an income of more than one million two hundred thousand kokus. Yet these great proprietors were, latterly at least, embarrassed men. They had many thousand mouths to

feed, and were mulcted of their dues right and left; while their mania for buying foreign ships and munitions of war, often at exorbitant prices, had plunged them heavily in debt.

"I've asked Latimer Springfield to spend Sunday with us and stop the night," announced Mrs. Durmot at the breakfast-table.

"I thought he was in the throes of an election," remarked her husband.

"Exactly; the poll is on Wednesday, and the poor man will have worked himself to a shadow by that time. Imagine what electioneering must be like in this awful soaking rain, going along slushy country roads and speaking to damp audiences in draughty schoolrooms, day after day for a fortnight. He'll have to put in an appearance at some place of worship on Sunday morning, and he can come to us immediately afterwards and have a thorough respite from everything connected with politics. I won't let him even think of them. I've had the picture of Cromwell dissolving the Long Parliament taken down from the staircase, and even the portrait of Lord Rosebery's 'Ladas' removed from the smoking-room. And Vera," added Mrs. Durmot, turning to her sixteen-year-old niece, "be careful what colour ribbon you wear in your hair; not blue or yellow on any account; those are the rival party colours, and emerald green or orange would be almost as bad, with this Home Rule business to the fore."

"On state occasions I always wear a black ribbon in my hair," said Vera with crushing dignity.

Latimer Springfield was a rather cheerless, oldish young man, who went into politics somewhat in the spirit in which other people might go into half-mourning. Without being an enthusiast, however, he was a fairly strenuous plodder, and Mrs. Durmot had been reasonably near the mark in asserting that he was working at high pressure over this election. The restful lull which his hostess enforced on him was decidedly welcome, and yet the nervous excitement of the contest had too great a hold on him to be totally banished.

"I know he's going to sit up half the night working up points for his

final speeches," said Mrs. Durmot regretfully; "however, we've kept politics at arm's length all the afternoon and evening. More than that we cannot do."

"That remains to be seen," said Vera, but she said it to herself.

Latimer had scarcely shut his bedroom door before he was immersed in a sheaf of notes and pamphlets, while a fountain-pen and pocket-book were brought into play for the due marshalling of useful facts and discreet fictions. He had been at work for perhaps thirty-five minutes, and the house was seemingly consecrated to the healthy slumber of country life, when a stifled squealing and scuffling in the passage was followed by a loud tap at his door. Before he had time to answer, a much-encumbered Vera burst into the room with the question; "I say, can I leave these here?"

"These" were a small black pig and a lusty specimen of black-red gamecock.

Latimer was moderately fond of animals, and particularly interested in small livestock rearing from the economic point of view; in fact, one of the pamphlets on which he was at that moment engaged warmly advocated the further development of the pig and poultry industry in our rural districts; but he was pardonably unwilling to share even a commodious bedroom with samples of henroost and styer products.

"Wouldn't they be happier somewhere outside?" he asked, tactfully expressing his own preference in the matter in an apparent solicitude for theirs.

"There is no outside," said Vera impressively, "nothing but a waste of dark, swirling waters. The reservoir at Brinkley has burst."

"I didn't know there was a reservoir at Brinkley," said Latimer.

"Well, there isn't now, it's jolly well all over the place, and as we stand particularly low we're the centre of an inland sea just at present. You see the river has overflowed its banks as well."

"Good gracious! Have any lives been lost?"

"Heaps, I should say. The second housemaid has already identified three bodies that have floated past the billiard-room window as being the young man she's engaged to. Either she's engaged to a large assortment of the population round here or else she's very careless at identification. Of course it may be the same body coming round again and again in a swirl; I hadn't thought of that."

"But we ought to go out and do rescue work, oughtn't we?" said Latimer, with the instinct of a Parliamentary candidate for getting into the local limelight.

"We can't," said Vera decidedly, "we haven't any boats and we're cut off by a raging torrent from any human habitation. My aunt particularly hoped you would keep to your room and not add to the confusion, but she thought it would be so kind of you if you would take in Hartlepool's Wonder, the gamecock, you know, for the night. You see, there are eight other gamecocks, and they fight like furies if they get together, so we're putting one in each bedroom. The fowl-houses are all flooded out, you know. And then I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind taking in this wee piggie; he's rather a little love, but he has a vile temper. He gets that from his mother--not that I like to say things against her when she's lying dead and drowned in her sty, poor thing. What he really wants is a man's firm hand to keep him in order. I'd try and grapple with him myself, only I've got my chow in my room, you know, and he goes for pigs wherever he finds them."

"Couldn't the pig go in the bathroom?" asked Latimer faintly, wishing that he had taken up as determined a stand on the subject of bedroom swine as the chow had.

"The bathroom?" Vera laughed shrilly. "It'll be full of Boy Scouts till morning if the hot water holds out."

"Boy Scouts?"

"Yes, thirty of them came to rescue us while the water was only waist-high; then it rose another three feet or so and we had to rescue them. We're giving them hot baths in batches and drying their clothes in the hot-air cupboard, but, of course, drenched clothes don't dry in a minute, and the corridor and staircase are beginning to look like a bit of coast scenery by Tuke. Two of the boys are wearing your Melton overcoat; I hope you don't mind."

"It's a new overcoat," said Latimer, with every indication of minding dreadfully.

"You'll take every care of Hartlepool's Wonder, won't you?" said Vera. "His mother took three firsts at Birmingham, and he was second in the cockerel class last year at Gloucester. He'll probably roost on the rail at the bottom of your bed. I wonder if he'd feel more at home if some of his wives were up here with him? The hens are all in the pantry, and I think I could pick out Hartlepool Helen; she's his favourite."

Latimer showed a belated firmness on the subject of Hartlepool Helen, and Vera withdrew without pressing the point, having first settled the gamecock on his extemporised perch and taken an affectionate farewell of the pigling. Latimer undressed and got into bed with all due speed, judging that the pig would abate its inquisitorial restlessness once the light was turned out. As a substitute for a cosy, straw-bedded sty the room offered, at first inspection, few attractions, but the disconsolate animal suddenly discovered an appliance in which the most luxuriously contrived piggeries were notably deficient. The sharp edge of the underneath part of the bed was pitched at exactly the right elevation to permit the pigling to scrape himself ecstatically backwards and forwards, with an artistic humping of the back at the crucial moment and an accompanying gurgle of long-drawn delight. The gamecock, who may have fancied that he was being rocked in the branches of a pine-tree, bore the motion with greater fortitude than Latimer was able to command. A series of slaps directed at the pig's body were accepted more as an additional and pleasing irritant than as a criticism of conduct or a hint to desist; evidently something more than a man's firm hand was needed to deal with the case. Latimer slipped out of bed in search of a weapon of dissuasion. There was sufficient light in the room to enable the pig to

detect this manoeuvre, and the vile temper, inherited from the drowned mother, found full play. Latimer bounded back into bed, and his conqueror, after a few threatening snorts and champings of its jaws, resumed its massage operations with renewed zeal. During the long wakeful hours which ensued Latimer tried to distract his mind from his own immediate troubles by dwelling with decent sympathy on the second housemaid's bereavement, but he found himself more often wondering how many Boy Scouts were sharing his Melton overcoat. The role of Saint Martin malgre lui was not one which appealed to him.

Towards dawn the pigling fell into a happy slumber, and Latimer might have followed its example, but at about the same time Stupor Hartlepooli gave a rousing crow, clattered down to the floor and forthwith commenced a spirited combat with his reflection in the wardrobe mirror. Remembering that the bird was more or less under his care Latimer performed Hague Tribunal offices by draping a bath-towel over the provocative mirror, but the ensuing peace was local and short-lived. The deflected energies of the gamecock found new outlet in a sudden and sustained attack on the sleeping and temporarily inoffensive pigling, and the duel which followed was desperate and embittered beyond any possibility of effective intervention. The feathered combatant had the advantage of being able, when hard pressed, to take refuge on the bed, and freely availed himself of this circumstance; the pigling never quite succeeded in hurling himself on to the same eminence, but it was not from want of trying.

Neither side could claim any decisive success, and the struggle had been practically fought to a standstill by the time that the maid appeared with the early morning tea.

"Lor, sir," she exclaimed in undisguised astonishment, "do you want those animals in your room?"

Want!

The pigling, as though aware that it might have overstayed its welcome, dashed out at the door, and the gamecock followed it at a more dignified pace.

"If Miss Vera's dog sees that pig--!" exclaimed the maid, and hurried off to avert such a catastrophe.

A cold suspicion was stealing over Latimer's mind; he went to the window and drew up the blind. A light, drizzling rain was falling, but there was not the faintest trace of any inundation.

Some half-hour later he met Vera on the way to the breakfast-room.

"I should not like to think of you as a deliberate liar," he observed coldly, "but one occasionally has to do things one does not like."

"At any rate I kept your mind from dwelling on politics all the night," said Vera.

Which was, of course, perfectly true.

MARI D'ELLE, by Anton Chekhov
from Love and Other Stories, EBook #13414

IT was a free night. Natalya Andreyevna Bronin (her married name was Nikitin), the opera singer, is lying in her bedroom, her whole being abandoned to repose. She lies, deliciously drowsy, thinking of her little daughter who lives somewhere far away with her grandmother or aunt. . . . The child is more precious to her than the public, bouquets, notices in the papers, adorers . . . and she would be glad to think about her till morning. She is happy, at peace, and all she longs for is not to be prevented from lying undisturbed, dozing and dreaming of her little girl.

All at once the singer starts, and opens her eyes wide: there is a harsh abrupt ring in the entry. Before ten seconds have passed the bell tinkles a second time and a third time. The door is opened noisily and some one walks into the entry stamping his feet like a horse, snorting and puffing with the cold.

"Damn it all, nowhere to hang one's coat!" the singer hears a husky bass voice. "Celebrated singer, look at that! Makes five thousand a year, and can't get a decent hat-stand!"

"My husband!" thinks the singer, frowning. "And I believe he has brought one of his friends to stay the night too. . . . Hateful!"

No more peace. When the loud noise of some one blowing his nose and putting off his goloshes dies away, the singer hears cautious footsteps in her bedroom. . . . It is her husband, _mari d'elle_, Denis Petrovitch Nikitin. He brings a whiff of cold air and a smell of brandy. For a long while he walks about the bedroom, breathing heavily, and, stumbling against the chairs in the dark, seems to be looking for something. . . .

"What do you want?" his wife moans, when she is sick of his fussing about. "You have woken me."

"I am looking for the matches, my love. You . . . you are not asleep

then? I have brought you a message. . . . Greetings from that . . . what's-his-name? . . . red-headed fellow who is always sending you bouquets. . . . Zagvozdkin. . . . I have just been to see him."

"What did you go to him for?"

"Oh, nothing particular. . . . We sat and talked and had a drink. Say what you like, Nathalie, I dislike that individual--I dislike him awfully! He is a rare blockhead. He is a wealthy man, a capitalist; he has six hundred thousand, and you would never guess it. Money is no more use to him than a radish to a dog. He does not eat it himself nor give it to others. Money ought to circulate, but he keeps tight hold of it, is afraid to part with it. . . . What's the good of capital lying idle? Capital lying idle is no better than grass."

Mari d'elle gropes his way to the edge of the bed and, puffing, sits down at his wife's feet.

"Capital lying idle is pernicious," he goes on. "Why has business gone downhill in Russia? Because there is so much capital lying idle among us; they are afraid to invest it. It's very different in England. . . . There are no such queer fish as Zagvozdkin in England, my girl. . . . There every farthing is in circulation Yes. . . . They don't keep it locked up in chests there"

"Well, that's all right. I am sleepy."

"Directly. . . . Whatever was it I was talking about? Yes. . . . In these hard times hanging is too good for Zagvozdkin. . . . He is a fool and a scoundrel. . . . No better than a fool. If I asked him for a loan without security--why, a child could see that he runs no risk whatever. He doesn't understand, the ass! For ten thousand he would have got a hundred. In a year he would have another hundred thousand. I asked, I talked . . . but he wouldn't give it me, the blockhead."

"I hope you did not ask him for a loan in my name."

"H'm. . . . A queer question. . . ." _Mari d'elle_ is offended.

"Anyway he would sooner give me ten thousand than you. You are a woman, and I am a man anyway, a business-like person. And what a scheme I propose to him! Not a bubble, not some chimera, but a sound thing, substantial! If one could hit on a man who would understand, one might get twenty thousand for the idea alone! Even you would understand if I were to tell you about it. Only you . . . don't chatter about it . . . not a word . . . but I fancy I have talked to you about it already. Have I talked to you about sausage-skins?"

"M'm . . . by and by."

"I believe I have. . . . Do you see the point of it? Now the provision shops and the sausage-makers get their sausage-skins locally, and pay a high price for them. Well, but if one were to bring sausage-skins from the Caucasus where they are worth nothing, and where they are thrown away, then . . . where do you suppose the sausage-makers would buy their skins, here in the slaughterhouses or from me? From me, of course! Why, I shall sell them ten times as cheap! Now let us look at it like this: every year in Petersburg and Moscow and in other centres these same skins would be bought to the . . . to the sum of five hundred thousand, let us suppose. That's the minimum. Well, and if. . . ."

"You can tell me to-morrow . . . later on. . . ."

"Yes, that's true. You are sleepy, _pardon_, I am just going . . . say what you like, but with capital you can do good business everywhere, wherever you go. . . . With capital even out of cigarette ends one may make a million. . . . Take your theatrical business now. Why, for example, did Lentovsky come to grief? It's very simple. He did not go the right way to work from the very first. He had no capital and he went headlong to the dogs. . . . He ought first to have secured his capital, and then to have gone slowly and cautiously Nowadays, one can easily make money by a theatre, whether it is a private one or a people's one. . . . If one produces the right

plays, charges a low price for admission, and hits the public fancy, one may put a hundred thousand in one's pocket the first year. . . . You don't understand, but I am talking sense. . . . You see you are fond of hoarding capital; you are no better than that fool Zagvozdkin, you heap it up and don't know what for. . . . You won't listen, you don't want to. . . . If you were to put it into circulation, you wouldn't have to be rushing all over the place You see for a private theatre, five thousand would be enough for a beginning. . . . Not like Lentovsky, of course, but on a modest scale in a small way. I have got a manager already, I have looked at a suitable building. . . . It's only the money I haven't got. . . . If only you understood things you would have parted with your Five per cents . . . your Preference shares. . . ."

"No, _merci_. . . . You have fleeced me enough already. . . . Let me alone, I have been punished already. . . ."

"If you are going to argue like a woman, then of course . . ." sighs Nikitin, getting up. "Of course. . . ."

"Let me alone. . . . Come, go away and don't keep me awake. . . . I am sick of listening to your nonsense."

"H'm. . . . To be sure . . . of course! Fleeced. . . plundered. . . . What we give we remember, but we don't remember what we take."

"I have never taken anything from you."

"Is that so? But when we weren't a celebrated singer, at whose expense did we live then? And who, allow me to ask, lifted you out of beggary and secured your happiness? Don't you remember that?"

"Come, go to bed. Go along and sleep it off."

"Do you mean to say you think I am drunk? . . . if I am so low in the eyes of such a grand lady. . . I can go away altogether."

"Do. A good thing too."

"I will, too. I have humbled myself enough. And I will go."

"Oh, my God! Oh, do go, then! I shall be delighted!"

"Very well, we shall see."

Nikitin mutters something to himself, and, stumbling over the chairs, goes out of the bedroom. Then sounds reach her from the entry of whispering, the shuffling of goloshes and a door being shut. _Mari d'elle_ has taken offence in earnest and gone out.

"Thank God, he has gone!" thinks the singer. "Now I can sleep."

And as she falls asleep she thinks of her _mari d'elle_, what sort of a man he is, and how this affliction has come upon her. At one time he used to live at Tchernigov, and had a situation there as a book-keeper. As an ordinary obscure individual and not the _mari d'elle_, he had been quite endurable: he used to go to his work and take his salary, and all his whims and projects went no further than a new guitar, fashionable trousers, and an amber cigarette-holder. Since he had become "the husband of a celebrity" he was completely transformed. The singer remembered that when first she told him she was going on the stage he had made a fuss, been indignant, complained to her parents, turned her out of the house. She had been obliged to go on the stage without his permission. Afterwards, when he learned from the papers and from various people that she was earning big sums, he had 'forgiven her,' abandoned book-keeping, and become her hanger-on. The singer was overcome with amazement when she looked at her hanger-on: when and where had he managed to pick up new tastes, polish, and airs and graces? Where had he learned the taste of oysters and of different Burgundies? Who had taught him to dress and do his hair in the fashion and call her 'Nathalie' instead of Natasha?"

"It's strange," thinks the singer. "In old days he used to get his salary and put it away, but now a hundred roubles a day is not enough for him. In old days he was afraid to talk before schoolboys

for fear of saying something silly, and now he is overfamiliar even with princes . . . wretched, contemptible little creature!"

But then the singer starts again; again there is the clang of the bell in the entry. The housemaid, scolding and angrily flopping with her slippers, goes to open the door. Again some one comes in and stamps like a horse.

"He has come back!" thinks the singer. "When shall I be left in peace? It's revolting!" She is overcome by fury.

"Wait a bit. . . I'll teach you to get up these farces! You shall go away. I'll make you go away!"

The singer leaps up and runs barefoot into the little drawing-room where her _mari_ usually sleeps. She comes at the moment when he is undressing, and carefully folding his clothes on a chair.

"You went away!" she says, looking at him with bright eyes full of hatred. "What did you come back for?"

Nikitin remains silent, and merely sniffs.

"You went away! Kindly take yourself off this very minute! This very minute! Do you hear?"

Mari d'elle coughs and, without looking at his wife, takes off his braces.

"If you don't go away, you insolent creature, I shall go," the singer goes on, stamping her bare foot, and looking at him with flashing eyes. "I shall go! Do you hear, insolent . . . worthless wretch, flunkey, out you go!"

"You might have some shame before outsiders," mutters her husband
. . . .

The singer looks round and only then sees an unfamiliar countenance that looks like an actor's. . . . The countenance, seeing the singer's uncovered shoulders and bare feet, shows signs of embarrassment, and looks ready to sink through the floor.

"Let me introduce . . ." mutters Nikitin, "Bezbozhnikov, a provincial manager."

The singer utters a shriek, and runs off into her bedroom.

"There, you see . . ." says _mari d'elle_, as he stretches himself on the sofa, "it was all honey just now . . . my love, my dear, my darling, kisses and embraces . . . but as soon as money is touched upon, then. . . . As you see . . . money is the great thing. . . . Good night!"

A minute later there is a snore.

A NIGHT IN A ROCKING-CHAIR by Kate Field
from The Wit and Humor of America, Volume V., EBook #19323

It may be true that America is going to perdition; that all Americans are rascals; that there are no American gentlemen; that culture, refinement, and social manners can only be found in the Old World: but if it be true, what an extraordinary anomaly it is that women, old and young, ugly and handsome, can travel alone from one end of this great country to the other, receiving only such attention as is acceptable. Having journeyed up and down the land to the extent of twenty thousand miles, I am persuaded that a woman can go anywhere and do anything, provided she conducts herself properly. Of course it would be absurd to deny that it is not infinitely more agreeable to be accompanied by the "tyrant" called "man"; but when there is no tyrant to come to lovely woman's rescue, it is astonishing how well lovely woman can rescue herself, if she exerts the brain and muscle, given her thousands of years ago, and not entirely annihilated by long disuse. I have been nowhere that I have not been treated with greater consideration than if I had belonged to the other sex. There is not a country in Europe of which this can be said; and if a nation's civilization is gauged--as the wise declare--by its treatment of women, then America, rough as it may be, badly dressed as it is, tobacco-chewing as it often is, stands head, shoulders, and heart above all the rest of the world. The Frenchwoman was right in declaring America to be *_le paradis des dames_*, and those women who exalt European gallantry above American honesty are as blind to their own interests as an owl at high noon.

There is no royal railroad to lecturing. At best it is hard work, but lecture committees "do their possible," as the Italians say, to lessen the weight, and that "possible" is heartily appreciated by such of us as inwardly long for a natural bridge between stations and hotels. A woman is never so forlorn as when getting out of a car or entering a strange hotel.

However, there never was a rule without its exception, and though courtesy has marked the majority of lecture committees for its own, a lecturer may occasionally find himself stranded upon a desert of

indifference, and languish for the comforts of a home not twenty miles distant. Thus it happened that once upon arriving at my destination when the shades of evening were falling fast, and glancing about for the customary smiling gentlemen who smooth out the rough places by carrying bags, superintending the transportation of luggage, and driving you to your abiding-place in the best carriage of the period, I found no gentlemen, smiling or otherwise, to deliver me from my own ignorance.

"Carriage, ma'am?" screamed a Jehu in top-boots ornamented with a grotesque tracery of mud.

Well, yes, I would take a carriage; so up I clambered and sat down upon what in the darkness I supposed was a seat, but what gave such palpable evidences of animation in howls and attempts at assault and battery, as to prove its right to be called a boy. "An' sure the lady didn't mane to hurt ye, Jimmy," expostulated something that turned out to be the boy's mother, whereupon a baby and a small sister of the small boy sent forth their voices in unison with that of their extinguished brother.

"Driver, let me get out," I said pathetically.

"Certainly, ma'am, but where will you go to? There ain't no other carriage left."

True; and I remained, and when I was asked where I wanted to stop, I really did not know. Was there a hotel? Yes. Was there more than one hotel? No. I breathed more freely, and said I would go to the hotel.

The driver evidently entertained a poor opinion of my mental capacity, for he mumbled to himself that "people who didn't know where they was agoin' had nuff sight better stay at home," and deposited me at the hotel with a caution against pickpockets. This was sufficiently humiliating, yet were there lower depths. Entering the parlor, I found it monopolized by a young lady in green silk and red ribbons, and a pink young man with his hair parted in the middle and his shirt-bosom resplendent with brilliants of the last water. They were at the piano, singing "Days of Absence" in a manner calculated to depress the most buoyant spirits. I rang the bell, and the green young lady and pink

young man began on the second verse. No answer. Again I rang the bell, and the songsters began on the third verse. No answer. Once more I rang the bell, and the green young lady and pink young man piped upon the touching lay of "No one to love." Little cared those "two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one," for the third heart and soul, victim of misplaced confidence. Ring! I rang that bell until I ached to be a man for one brief moment. Does a man ever endure such torture? No. He puts on his hat, walks into the hotel office, gives somebody a piece of his mind, and demands the satisfaction of a gentleman. But a woman can go to no office. She must remain up stairs and cultivate patience on hunger and thirst and a general mortification of the senses. "Victory, or destruction to the bell!" I said at last, and pulled the rope with the desperation of a maniac.

"Did you ring?" asked a mild clerk, entering on the tips of his toes as if there were not enough of him to warrant so extravagant an expenditure as the use of his whole sole. Did I ring? I who had been doing nothing else for half an hour! I who had but forty-five minutes in which to eat my supper and dress for the lecture!

Presenting my card, I desired the mild clerk to show me to my room. The mild clerk was exceedingly sorry, but the committee had left no order, and there was not a vacant room in the house!

"What am I to do?" I asked in agony of spirit. "I must have a room."

Must is an overpowering word. Only say must with all the emphasis of which it is capable, and longings are likely to be realized.

Well, the mild clerk didn't know but as how he might turn out and let me have his room.

Blessed man! Had I been pope, he should have been canonized on the spot. Following him up several steep flights of stairs, lighted by a kerosene lamp that perfumed the air as only kerosene can, I was at last ushered into a room where sat a young girl knitting. She seemed to be no more astonished at my appearance than were the chairs and table, merely remarking, when we were left alone, "That's my father. I suppose you

won't have any objections to my staying here as long as I please." How could I, an interloper, say "no" to the rightful proprietor of that room? I smiled feebly, and the damsel pursued her knitting with her fingers and me with her eyes, until everything in the room seemed to turn into eyes. The frightful thought came o'er me that perhaps my companion was "our own correspondent" for the "Daily Slasher!"--a thought that sent my supper down the wrong way, deprived me of appetite, and made me thankful that my back hair did not come off! The damsel sat and sat, knitted and knitted, until she had superintended every preparation, and then, like an Arab, silently stole away.

What next? Why, the committee called for me at the appointed hour, seemed blandly ignorant of the fact that they had not done their whole duty to woman, and maintained that walking was much better than driving. The wind blew, dust sought shelter within the recesses of eyes and ears and nose, but patient Griselda could not have behaved better than I. In fact, a woman who lectures must endure quietly what a singer or actress would stoutly protest against, for the reason that lecturing brings down upon her the taunt of being "strong-minded," and any assertion of rights or exhibition of temper is sure to be misconstrued into violent hatred of men and an insane desire to be President of the United States. This can hardly be called logic, but it is truth. Logic is an unknown quantity in the ordinary public estimation of women lecturers.

Inwardly cross and outwardly cold, I delivered my lecture, and went back to that much-populated room, thinking that at least I should obtain a few hours' sleep before starting off at "five o'clock in the morning,"--a nice hour to sing about, but a horrible one at which to get up. I approached the bed. Shade of that virtue which is next to godliness! the linen was--was--yes, it was--second-hand! and calmly reposing on a pillow of doubtful color, my startled vision beheld an

"... ugly, creepin', blastit wonner,
Detested, shunn'd, by saunt an' sinner."

That I should come to this! I sought for a bell. Alas, there was none! Should I scream? No, that might bring out the fire-engines. Should I go in search of the housekeeper? How to find her at that hour of the night?

No; rather than wander about a strange house in a strange place, I would sit up. Of course there was a rocking-chair; in that I took refuge, and there I sat with a quaint old-fashioned clock for company, with such stout lungs as to render sleep an impossibility. No fairy godmother came in at the key-hole to transform my chair into a couch and that talkative clock into a handmaiden. No ghosts beguiled the weary hours. Eleven, twelve, one, two, three, four! As the clock struck this last hour, a porter pounded on the door, and, not long after, I was being driven through the cold, dark morning to a railroad station. My Jehu was he of the previous day, and a very nice fellow he turned out to be. "I didn't know it was you yesterday, you see, miss, or I wouldn't have said nothing about pickpockets. You don't look like a lecturer, you see, and that's what's the matter."

"Indeed, and how ought a lecturer to look?"

"Well, I don't exactly know, but I always supposed they didn't look like you. Reckon you don't enjoy staying around here in the dark, so I'll just wait here till the train comes," and there that good creature remained until the belated train snatched me up and whisked off to the city. When the express agent passed through the car to take the baggage-checks, it was as good as a play to see the different ways in which people woke up. Some turned over and wouldn't wake up at all; others sat bolt upright and blinked; some were very cross, and wondered why they could not be let alone; others, again, rubbed their eyes, scratched their heads, said "All right," and would have gone to sleep again had not the agent shaken them into consciousness.

"Where do you go?" asked the agent of a quiet old gentleman sitting before me, who had previously given up his checks.

"Yes, exactly; that's my name," replied the old gentleman.

"Where do you go?" again asked the agent in a somewhat louder tone.

"Exactly, I told you so." And the old gentleman put a pocket handkerchief over his face as a preliminary to sleep.

"Well, I never," exclaimed the agent, who returned to the charge. "I asked you where you wanted to go?"

"Precisely; that's my name."

"Confound your name!" muttered the agent. "You're either deaf or insane, and I guess you're deaf." So putting his mouth to the old gentleman's ear, he shouted, "Where--do--you--want--to--go?"

"O, really, the ---- House," was the mild answer to a question that so startled everybody else as to cause one man to jump up and cry, "Fire!" very much to the gratification of his fellow-passengers. There is nothing more pleasing to human beings than to see somebody else make himself ridiculous, and the amusement extracted from the contemplation of that car-load of men and women almost compensated me for the previous experience.

I have since traveled in the far West, but have never looked upon the counterpart of that New England hotel.

TO --.

[OH! THERE ARE SPIRITS OF THE AIR] by Percy Bysshe Shelley
from The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley Volume II
EBook #4798

DAKRTSI DIOISO POTMON 'APOTMON.

Oh! there are spirits of the air,
And genii of the evening breeze,
And gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair
As star-beams among twilight trees:--
Such lovely ministers to meet _5
Oft hast thou turned from men thy lonely feet.

With mountain winds, and babbling springs,
And moonlight seas, that are the voice
Of these inexplicable things,
Thou didst hold commune, and rejoice _10
When they did answer thee; but they
Cast, like a worthless boon, thy love away.

And thou hast sought in starry eyes
Beams that were never meant for thine,
Another's wealth:--tame sacrifice
To a fond faith! still dost thou pine? _15
Still dost thou hope that greeting hands,
Voice, looks, or lips, may answer thy demands?

Ah! wherefore didst thou build thine hope
On the false earth's inconstancy? _20
Did thine own mind afford no scope
Of love, or moving thoughts to thee?
That natural scenes or human smiles
Could steal the power to wind thee in their wiles?

Yes, all the faithless smiles are fled _25
Whose falsehood left thee broken-hearted;
The glory of the moon is dead;
Night's ghosts and dreams have now departed;
Thine own soul still is true to thee,
But changed to a foul fiend through misery. _30

This fiend, whose ghastly presence ever
Beside thee like thy shadow hangs,
Dream not to chase;--the mad endeavour
Would scourge thee to severer pangs.
Be as thou art. Thy settled fate,
Dark as it is, all change would aggravate.

PIG by Rudyard Kipling
from Plain Tales from the Hills, EBook #1858

Go, stalk the red deer o'er the heather
Ride, follow the fox if you can!
But, for pleasure and profit together,
Allow me the hunting of Man,--
The chase of the Human, the search for the Soul
To its ruin,--the hunting of Man.

The Old Shikarri.

I believe the difference began in the matter of a horse, with a twist in his temper, whom Pinecoffin sold to Nafferton and by whom Nafferton was nearly slain. There may have been other causes of offence; the horse was the official stalking-horse. Nafferton was very angry; but Pinecoffin laughed and said that he had never guaranteed the beast's manners. Nafferton laughed, too, though he vowed that he would write off his fall against Pinecoffin if he waited five years. Now, a Dalesman from beyond Skipton will forgive an injury when the Strid lets a man live; but a South Devon man is as soft as a Dartmoor bog. You can see from their names that Nafferton had the race-advantage of Pinecoffin. He was a peculiar man, and his notions of humor were cruel. He taught me a new and fascinating form of shikar. He hounded Pinecoffin from Mithankot to Jagadri, and from Gurgaon to Abbottabad up and across the Punjab, a large province and in places remarkably dry. He said that he had no intention of allowing Assistant Commissioners to "sell him pups," in the shape of ramping, screaming countrybreds, without making their lives a burden to them.

Most Assistant Commissioners develop a bent for some special work after their first hot weather in the country. The boys with digestions hope to write their names large on the Frontier and struggle for dreary places like Bannu and Kohat. The bilious ones climb into the Secretariat. Which is very bad for the liver. Others are bitten with a mania for District work, Ghuznive coins or Persian poetry; while some, who come of farmers' stock, find that the smell of the Earth after the Rains gets

into their blood, and calls them to "develop the resources of the Province." These men are enthusiasts. Pinecoffin belonged to their class. He knew a great many facts bearing on the cost of bullocks and temporary wells, and opium-scrapers, and what happens if you burn too much rubbish on a field, in the hope of enriching used-up soil. All the Pinecoffins come of a landholding breed, and so the land only took back her own again. Unfortunately--most unfortunately for Pinecoffin--he was a Civilian, as well as a farmer. Nafferton watched him, and thought about the horse. Nafferton said:--"See me chase that boy till he drops!" I said:--"You can't get your knife into an Assistant Commissioner." Nafferton told me that I did not understand the administration of the Province.

Our Government is rather peculiar. It gushes on the agricultural and general information side, and will supply a moderately respectable man with all sorts of "economic statistics," if he speaks to it prettily. For instance, you are interested in gold-washing in the sands of the Sutlej. You pull the string, and find that it wakes up half a dozen Departments, and finally communicates, say, with a friend of yours in the Telegraph, who once wrote some notes on the customs of the gold-washers when he was on construction-work in their part of the Empire. He may or may not be pleased at being ordered to write out everything he knows for your benefit. This depends on his temperament. The bigger man you are, the more information and the greater trouble can you raise.

Nafferton was not a big man; but he had the reputation of being very earnest. An "earnest" man can do much with a Government. There was an earnest man who once nearly wrecked... but all India knows THAT story. I am not sure what real "earnestness" is. A very fair imitation can be manufactured by neglecting to dress decently, by mooning about in a dreamy, misty sort of way, by taking office-work home after staying in office till seven, and by receiving crowds of native gentlemen on Sundays. That is one sort of "earnestness."

Nafferton cast about for a peg whereon to hang his earnestness, and for a string that would communicate with Pinecoffin. He found both. They were Pig. Nafferton became an earnest inquirer after Pig. He informed

the Government that he had a scheme whereby a very large percentage of the British Army in India could be fed, at a very large saving, on Pig. Then he hinted that Pinecoffin might supply him with the "varied information necessary to the proper inception of the scheme." So the Government wrote on the back of the letter:--"Instruct Mr. Pinecoffin to furnish Mr. Nafferton with any information in his power." Government is very prone to writing things on the backs of letters which, later, lead to trouble and confusion.

Nafferton had not the faintest interest in Pig, but he knew that Pinecoffin would flounce into the trap. Pinecoffin was delighted at being consulted about Pig. The Indian Pig is not exactly an important factor in agricultural life; but Nafferton explained to Pinecoffin that there was room for improvement, and corresponded direct with that young man.

You may think that there is not much to be evolved from Pig. It all depends how you set to work. Pinecoffin being a Civilian and wishing to do things thoroughly, began with an essay on the Primitive Pig, the Mythology of the Pig, and the Dravidian Pig. Nafferton filed that information--twenty-seven foolscap sheets--and wanted to know about the distribution of the Pig in the Punjab, and how it stood the Plains in the hot weather. From this point onwards, remember that I am giving you only the barest outlines of the affair--the guy-ropes, as it were, of the web that Nafferton spun round Pinecoffin.

Pinecoffin made a colored Pig-population map, and collected observations on the comparative longevity of the Pig (a) in the sub-montane tracts of the Himalayas, and (b) in the Rechna Doab. Nafferton filed that, and asked what sort of people looked after Pig. This started an ethnological excursus on swineherds, and drew from Pinecoffin long tables showing the proportion per thousand of the caste in the Derajat. Nafferton filed that bundle, and explained that the figures which he wanted referred to the Cis-Sutlej states, where he understood that Pigs were very fine and large, and where he proposed to start a Piggery. By this time, Government had quite forgotten their instructions to Mr. Pinecoffin. They were like the gentlemen, in Keats' poem, who turned well-oiled wheels to skin other people. But Pinecoffin was just entering into the

spirit of the Pig-hunt, as Nafferton well knew he would do. He had a fair amount of work of his own to clear away; but he sat up of nights reducing Pig to five places of decimals for the honor of his Service. He was not going to appear ignorant of so easy a subject as Pig.

Then Government sent him on special duty to Kohat, to "inquire into" the big-seven-foot, iron-shod spades of that District. People had been killing each other with those peaceful tools; and Government wished to know "whether a modified form of agricultural implement could not, tentatively and as a temporary measure, be introduced among the agricultural population without needlessly or unduly exasperating the existing religious sentiments of the peasantry."

Between those spades and Nafferton's Pig, Pinecoffin was rather heavily burdened.

Nafferton now began to take up "(a) The food-supply of the indigenous Pig, with a view to the improvement of its capacities as a flesh-former. (b) The acclimatization of the exotic Pig, maintaining its distinctive peculiarities." Pinecoffin replied exhaustively that the exotic Pig would become merged in the indigenous type; and quoted horse-breeding statistics to prove this. The side-issue was debated, at great length on Pinecoffin's side, till Nafferton owned that he had been in the wrong, and moved the previous question. When Pinecoffin had quite written himself out about flesh-formers, and fibrins, and glucose and the nitrogenous constituents of maize and lucerne, Nafferton raised the question of expense. By this time Pinecoffin, who had been transferred from Kohat, had developed a Pig theory of his own, which he stated in thirty-three folio pages--all carefully filed by Nafferton. Who asked for more.

These things took ten months, and Pinecoffin's interest in the potential Piggery seemed to die down after he had stated his own views. But Nafferton bombarded him with letters on "the Imperial aspect of the scheme, as tending to officialize the sale of pork, and thereby calculated to give offence to the Mahomedan population of Upper India." He guessed that Pinecoffin would want some broad, free-hand work after his niggling, stippling, decimal details. Pinecoffin handled the latest

development of the case in masterly style, and proved that no "popular ebullition of excitement was to be apprehended." Nafferton said that there was nothing like Civilian insight in matters of this kind, and lured him up a bye-path--"the possible profits to accrue to the Government from the sale of hog-bristles." There is an extensive literature of hog-bristles, and the shoe, brush, and colorman's trades recognize more varieties of bristles than you would think possible. After Pinecoffin had wondered a little at Nafferton's rage for information, he sent back a monograph, fifty-one pages, on "Products of the Pig." This led him, under Nafferton's tender handling, straight to the Cawnpore factories, the trade in hog-skin for saddles--and thence to the tanners. Pinecoffin wrote that pomegranate-seed was the best cure for hog-skin, and suggested--for the past fourteen months had wearied him--that Nafferton should "raise his pigs before he tanned them."

Nafferton went back to the second section of his fifth question. How could the exotic Pig be brought to give as much pork as it did in the West and yet "assume the essentially hirsute characteristics of its oriental congener?" Pinecoffin felt dazed, for he had forgotten what he had written sixteen month's before, and fancied that he was about to reopen the entire question. He was too far involved in the hideous tangle to retreat, and, in a weak moment, he wrote:--"Consult my first letter." Which related to the Dravidian Pig. As a matter of fact, Pinecoffin had still to reach the acclimatization stage; having gone off on a side-issue on the merging of types.

THEN Nafferton really unmasked his batteries! He complained to the Government, in stately language, of "the paucity of help accorded to me in my earnest attempts to start a potentially remunerative industry, and the flippancy with which my requests for information are treated by a gentleman whose pseudo-scholarly attainments should at least have taught him the primary differences between the Dravidian and the Berkshire variety of the genus *Sus*. If I am to understand that the letter to which he refers me contains his serious views on the acclimatization of a valuable, though possibly uncleanly, animal, I am reluctantly compelled to believe," etc., etc.

There was a new man at the head of the Department of Castigation. The

wretched Pinecoffin was told that the Service was made for the Country, and not the Country for the Service, and that he had better begin to supply information about Pigs.

Pinecoffin answered insanely that he had written everything that could be written about Pig, and that some furlough was due to him.

Nafferton got a copy of that letter, and sent it, with the essay on the Dravidian Pig, to a down-country paper, which printed both in full. The essay was rather highflown; but if the Editor had seen the stacks of paper, in Pinecoffin's handwriting, on Nafferton's table, he would not have been so sarcastic about the "nebulous discursiveness and blatant self-sufficiency of the modern Competition-wallah, and his utter inability to grasp the practical issues of a practical question." Many friends cut out these remarks and sent them to Pinecoffin.

I have already stated that Pinecoffin came of a soft stock. This last stroke frightened and shook him. He could not understand it; but he felt he had been, somehow, shamelessly betrayed by Nafferton. He realized that he had wrapped himself up in the Pigskin without need, and that he could not well set himself right with his Government. All his acquaintances asked after his "nebulous discursiveness" or his "blatant self-sufficiency," and this made him miserable.

He took a train and went to Nafferton, whom he had not seen since the Pig business began. He also took the cutting from the paper, and blustered feebly and called Nafferton names, and then died down to a watery, weak protest of the "I-say-it's-too-bad-you-know" order.

Nafferton was very sympathetic.

"I'm afraid I've given you a good deal of trouble, haven't I?" said he.

"Trouble!" whimpered Pinecoffin; "I don't mind the trouble so much, though that was bad enough; but what I resent is this showing up in print. It will stick to me like a burr all through my service. And I DID do my best for your interminable swine. It's too bad of you, on my soul it is!"

"I don't know," said Nafferton; "have you ever been stuck with a horse? It isn't the money I mind, though that is bad enough; but what I resent is the chaff that follows, especially from the boy who stuck me. But I think we'll cry quite now."

Pinecoffin found nothing to say save bad words; and Nafferton smiled ever so sweetly, and asked him to dinner.

THE QUEER LITTLE THING by Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd
from *Prairie Gold*, EBook #39957

Bonita Allen was a queer little thing. Everyone in the school, from Miss Ryder down to the chambermaid, had made remarks to that effect before the child had spent forty-eight hours in the house, yet no one seemed able to give a convincing reason for the general impression.

The new pupil was quiet, docile, moderately well dressed, fairly good looking. She did nothing extraordinary. In fact, she effaced herself as far as possible; yet from the first she caused a ripple in the placid current of the school, and her personality was distinctly felt.

"I think it's her eyes," hazarded Belinda, as she and Miss Barnes discussed the new-comer in the Youngest Teacher's room. "They aren't girl eyes at all."

"Fine eyes," asserted the teacher of mathematics with her usual curtness.

Belinda nodded emphatic assent. "Yes, of course; beautiful, but so big and pathetic and dumb. I feel ridiculously apologetic every time the child looks at me, and as for punishing her--I'd as soon shoot a deer at six paces. It's all wrong. A twelve-year-old girl hasn't any right to eyes like those. If the youngster is unhappy she ought to cry twenty-five handkerchiefs full of tears, as Evangeline Marie did when she came, and then get over it. And if she's happy she ought to smile with her eyes as well as with her lips. I can't stand self-repression in children."

"She'll be all right when she has been here longer and begins to feel at home," said Miss Barnes. But Belinda shook her head doubtfully as she went down to superintend study hour.

Seated at her desk in the big schoolroom she looked idly along the rows of girlish heads until she came to one bent stoically over a book. The new pupil was not fidgeting like her comrades. Apparently her every thought was concentrated upon the book before her. Her

elbows were on her desk, and one lean little brown hand supported the head, whose masses of straight black hair were parted in an unerring white line and fell in two heavy braids. The face framed in the smooth shining hair was lean as the hand, yet held no suggestion of ill-health. It was clean cut, almost to sharpness, brown with the brownness that comes from wind and sun, oddly firm about chin and lips, high of cheekbones, straight of nose.

As Belinda looked two dark eyes were raised from the book and met her own--sombre eyes with a hurt in them--and an uncomfortable lump rose in the Youngest Teacher's throat. She smiled at the sad little face, but the smile was not a merry one. In some unaccountable way it spoke of the sympathetic lump in her throat, and the Queer Little Thing seemed to read the message, for the ghost of an answering smile flickered in the brown depths before the lids dropped over them.

When study hour was over the Youngest Teacher moved hastily to the door, with some vague idea of following up the successful smile, and establishing diplomatic relations with the new girl; but she was not quick enough. Bonita had slipped into the hall and hurried up the stair toward the shelter of her own room.

Shrugging her shoulders, Belinda turned toward the door of Miss Ryder's study and knocked.

"Come in."

The voice was not encouraging. Miss Lucilla objected to interruptions in the late evening hours, when she relaxed from immaculately fitted black silk to the undignified folds of a violet dressing gown.

When she recognized the intruder she thawed perceptibly.

"Oh, Miss Carewe! Come in. Nothing wrong, is there?"

Belinda dropped into a chair with a whimsical sigh.

"Nothing wrong except my curiosity. Miss Ryder, do tell me something

about that Allen child."

Miss Lucilla eyed her subordinate questioningly.

"What has she been doing?"

"Nothing at all. I wish she would do something. It's what she doesn't do, and looks capable of doing, that bothers me. There's simply no getting at her. She's from Texas, isn't she?"

The principal regarded attentively one of the grapes she was eating, and there was an interval of silence.

"She is a queer little thing," Miss Lucilla admitted at last. "Yes, she's from Texas, but that's no reason why she should be odd. We've had a number of young ladies from Texas, and they were quite like other school girls only more so. Just between you and me, Miss Carewe, I think it must be the child's Indian blood that makes her seem different."

"Indian?" Belinda sat up, sniffing romance in the air.

"Yes, her father mentioned the strain quite casually when he wrote. It's rather far back in the family, but he seemed to think it might account for the girl's intense love for nature and dislike of conventions. Mrs. Allen died when the baby was born, and the father has brought the child up on a ranch. He's completely wrapped up in her, but he finally realized that she needed to be with women. He's worth several millions and he wants to educate her so that she'll enjoy the money--'be a fine lady,' as he puts it. I confess his description of the girl disturbed me at first, but he was so liberal in regard to terms that----"

Miss Lucilla left the sentence in the air and meditatively ate another bunch of grapes.

"Did her father come up with her?" Belinda asked.

"No, he sent her with friends who happened to be coming--highly respectable couple, but breezy, very breezy. They told me that Bonita could ride any broncho on the ranch and could shoot a jack-rabbit on the run. They seemed to think she would be a great addition to our school circle on that account. Personally I'm much relieved to find her so tractable and quiet, but I've noticed something--well--unusual about her."

As Belinda went up to bed she met a slim little figure in a barbaric red and yellow dressing gown crossing the hall. There was a shy challenge in the serious child face, although the little feet, clad in soft beaded moccasins, quickened their steps; and Belinda answered the furtive friendliness by slipping an arm around the girl's waist and drawing her into the tiny hall bedroom.

"You haven't been to see me. It's one of the rules that every girl shall have a cup of cocoa with me before she has been here three evenings," she said laughingly.

The Queer Little Thing accepted the overture soberly and, curled up in the one big chair, watched the teacher in silence.

The cocoa was soon under way. Then the hostess turned and smiled frankly at her guest. Belinda's smile is a reassuring thing.

"Homesick business, isn't it?" she said abruptly, with a warm note of comradeship in her voice.

The tense little figure in the big chair leaned forward with sudden, swift confidence.

"I'm going home," announced Bonita in a tone that made no reservations.

Belinda received the news without the quiver of an eyelash or a sign of incredulity.

"When?" she asked with interest warm enough to invite confession and

not emphatic enough to rouse distrust.

"I don't know just when, but I have to go. I can't stand it and I've written to Daddy. He'll understand. Nobody here knows. They're all used to it. They've always lived in houses like this, with little back yards that have high walls around them, and sidewalks and streets right outside the front windows, and crowds of strange people going by all the time, and just rules, rules, rules, everywhere. Everybody has so many manners, and they talk about things I don't know anything about, and nobody would understand if I talked about the real things."

"Perhaps I'll understand a little bit," murmured Belinda. The Queer Little Thing put out one hand and touched the Youngest Teacher's knee gently in a shy, caressing fashion.

"No, you wouldn't understand, because you don't know; but you could learn. The others couldn't. The prairie wouldn't talk to them and they'd be lonesome--the way I am here. Dick says you have got to learn the language when you are little, or else have a gift for such languages, but that when you've once learned it you don't care to hear any other."

"Who's Dick?" Belinda asked.

"Dick? Oh he's just Dick. He taught me to ride and to shoot, and he used to read poetry to me, and he told me stories about everything. He used to go to a big school called Harvard, but he was lonesome there--the way I am here."

"The way I am here" dropped into the talk like a persistent refrain, and there was heartache in it.

"I want to go home," the child went on. Now that the dam of silence was down the pent-up feeling rushed out tumultuously. "I want to see Daddy and the boys and the horses and the cattle, and I want to watch the sun go down over the edge of the world, not just tumble down among the dirty houses, and I want to gallop over the prairie where there aren't any roads, and smell the grass and watch the birds and the sky."

You ought to see the sky down there at night, Miss Carewe. It's so big and black and soft and full of bright stars, and you can see clear to where it touches the ground all around you, and there's a night breeze that's cool as cool, and the boys all play their banjos and guitars and sing, and Daddy and I sit over on our veranda and listen. There's only a little narrow strip of sky with two or three stars in it out of my window here, and it's so noisy and cluttered out in the back yards--and I hate walking in a procession on the ugly old streets, and doing things when bells ring. I hate it. I hate it."

Her voice hadn't risen at all, had only grown more and more vibrant with passionate rebellion. The sharp little face was drawn and pale, but there were no tears in the big tragic eyes.

Belinda had consoled many homesick little girls, but this was a different problem.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "Don't you think It will be easier after a while?"

The small girl with the old face shook her head.

"No, it won't. It isn't in me to like all this. I'm so sorry, because Daddy wants me to be a lady. He said it was as hard for him to send me as it was for me to come, but that I couldn't learn to be a lady with lots of money to spend down there with only boys and him. There wasn't any lady there on the ranch at all, except Mammy Lou, the cook, and she didn't have lots of money to spend, so she wasn't the kind he meant. I thought I'd come and try, but I didn't know it would be like this. I don't want to be a lady, Miss Carewe. I don't believe they can be very happy. I've seen them in carriages and they don't look very happy. You're nice. I like you, and I'm most sure Daddy and Dick and the boys would like you, but then you haven't got lots of money, have you? And you were born up here and you don't know any better anyway. I'm going home."

The burst of confidence ended where it had begun. She was going home, and she was so firm in the faith that Belinda, listening, believed

her.

"But if your father says no?"

The dark little face was quiet again, all but the great eyes.

"I'll have to go," the Queer Little Thing slowly said.

Four days later Miss Lucilla Ryder called the Youngest Teacher into the study.

"Miss Carewe, I'm puzzled about this little Miss Allen. I had a letter from her father this morning. He says that she has written that she is very homesick and unhappy and doesn't want to stay. He feels badly about it, of course, but he very wisely leaves the matter in our hands--says he realizes she'll have to be homesick and he'll have to be lonesome if she's to be a lady. But he wants us to do all we can to make her contented. He very generously sends a check for five hundred dollars, which we are to use for any extra expense incurred in entertaining her and making her happy. Now, I thought you might take her to the theater and the art museum, and the--a--the aquarium, and introduce her to the pleasures and advantages of city life. She'll soon be all right."

With sinking heart Belinda went in search of the girl. She found her practicing five-finger exercises drearily in one of the music-rooms. As Belinda entered the child looked up and met the friendly, sympathetic eyes. A mute appeal sprang into her own eyes, and Belinda understood. The thing was too bad to be talked about, and the Youngest Teacher said no word about the homesickness or the expected letter. In this way she clinched her friendship with the Queer Little Thing.

But, following the principal's orders, she endeavored to demonstrate to Bonita the joy and blessedness of life in New York. The child went, quietly wherever she was taken--a mute, pathetic little figure to whom the aquarium fish and the Old Masters and the latest matinee idol were all one--and unimportant. The other girls envied her her privileges and her pocket-money, but they did not understand. No one understood

save Belinda, and she did her cheerful best to blot out old loves with new impressions; but from the first she felt in her heart that she was elected to failure. The child was fond of her, always respectful, always docile, always grave. Nothing brought a light into her eyes or a spontaneous smile to her lips. Anyone save Belinda would have grown impatient, angry. She only grew more tender--and more troubled. Day by day she watched the sad little face grow thinner. It was pale now, instead of brown, and the high cheek bones were strikingly prominent. The lips pressed closely together drooped plaintively at the corners and the big eyes were more full of shadow than ever; but the child made no protest or plea, and by tacit consent she and Belinda ignored their first conversation and never mentioned Texas.

Often Belinda made up her mind to put aside the restraint and talk freely as she would to any other girl, but there was something about the little Texan that forbade liberties, warned off intruders, and the Youngest Teacher feared losing what little ground she had gained.

Finally she went in despair to Miss Ryder.

"The Indian character is too much for me," she confessed with a groan half humorous, half earnest. "I give it up."

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Ryder.

"Well, I've dragged poor Bonita Allen all over the borough of Manhattan and the Bronx and spent many ducats in the process. She has been very polite about it, but just as sad over Sherry's tea hour as over Grant's tomb, and just as cheerful over the Cesnola collection as over the monkey cages at the Zoo. The poor little thing is so unhappy and miserable that she looks like a wild animal in a trap, and I think the best we can do with her is to send her home.

"Nonsense," said Miss Lucilla. "Her father is paying eighteen hundred dollars a year."

Belinda was defiant.

"I don't care. He ought to take her home."

"Miss Carewe, you are sentimentalizing. One would think you had never seen a homesick girl before."

"She's different from other girls."

"I'll talk with her myself," said Miss Lucilla sternly.

She did, but the situation remained unchanged, and when she next mentioned the Texan problem to Belinda, Miss Lucilla was less positive in her views.

"She's a very strange child, but we must do what we can to carry out her father's wishes."

"I'd send her home," said Belinda.

It was shortly after this that Katherine Holland, who sat beside Bonita at the table, confided to Belinda that that funny little Allen girl didn't eat a thing. The waitress came to Belinda with the same tale, and the Youngest Teacher sought out Bonita and reasoned with her.

"You really must eat, my dear," she urged.

"Why?"

"You'll be ill if you don't."

"How soon?"

Belinda looked dazed.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"How soon will I be sick?"

"Very soon, I'm afraid," the puzzled teacher answered.

"That's good. I don't feel as if I could wait much longer."

Belinda gasped.

"Do you mean to say you want to be ill?"

"If I get very sick Daddy will come for me."

The teacher looked helplessly at the quiet, great-eyed child, then launched into expostulation, argument, entreaty.

Bonita listened politely and was profoundly unimpressed.

"It's wicked, dear child. It would make your father wretchedly unhappy."

"He'd be awfully unhappy if he understood, anyway. He thinks I'm not really unhappy and that it's his duty to keep me here and make a lady of me, no matter how lonely he is without me. He wrote me so--but I know he'd be terribly glad if he had a real excuse for taking me home."

Belinda exhausted her own resources and appealed to Miss Lucilla, who stared incredulously over her nose-glasses and sent for Bonita.

After the interview she called for the Youngest Teacher, and the two failures looked at each other helplessly.

"It's an extraordinary thing," said Miss Lucilla in her most magisterial tone--"a most extraordinary thing. In all my experience I've seen nothing like it. Nothing seems to make the slightest impression upon the child. She's positively crazy."

"You will tell her father to send for her, won't you?"

Miss Lucilla shook her head stubbornly.

"Not at all. It would be the ruination of the child to give in to her whims and bad temper now. If she won't listen to reason she must be allowed to pay for her foolishness. When she gets hungry enough she will eat. It's a shame to talk about a child of twelve having the stoicism to starve herself into an illness just because she is homesick at boarding-school."

Belinda came back to her thread-worn argument.

"But Bonita is different, Miss Ryder."

"She's a very stubborn, selfish child," said Miss Ryder resentfully, and turning to her desk she changed the conversation.

Despite discipline, despite pleadings, despite cajolery, Bonita stood firm. Eat she would not, and when, on her way to class one morning the scrap of humanity with the set lips and the purple shadows round her eyes fainted quietly, Belinda felt that a masterly inactivity had ceased to be a virtue.

James, the house man, carried the girl upstairs, and the Youngest Teacher put her to bed, where she opened her eyes to look unseeingly at Belinda and then closed them wearily and lay quite still, a limp little creature whose pale face looked pitifully thin and lifeless against the white pillow. The Queer Little Thing's wish had been fulfilled and illness had come without long delay.

For a moment Belinda looked down at the girl. Then she turned and went swiftly to Miss Ryder's study, her eyes blazing, her mouth so stern that Amelia Bowers, who met her on the stairs, hurried to spread the news that Miss Carewe "was perfectly hopping mad about something."

Once in the presence of the August One the little teacher lost no time in parley.

"Miss Ryder," she said crisply--and at the tone her employer looked up in amazement--"I've told you about Bonita Allen. I've been to you

again and again about her. You knew that she was fretting her heart out and half sick, and then you knew that for several days she hasn't been eating a thing. I tried to make you understand that the matter was serious and that something radical needed to be done, but you insisted that the child would come around all right and that we mustn't give in to her. I begged you to send for her father and you said it wasn't necessary. I'm here to take your orders, Miss Ryder, but I can't stand this sort of thing. I know the girl better than any of the rest of you do, and I know it isn't badness that makes her act so. Now she is ill--really ill. I've just put her to bed, and honestly, Miss Ryder, if we don't send for her father we'll have a tragedy on our hands. It sounds foolish, but it is true. If nobody else telegraphs to Mr. Allen I am going to do it."

* * * * *

When the doctor came there were bright red spots on the Queer Little Thing's cheeks, and she was babbling incoherently about prairie flowers and horses and Dick and Daddy.

Meanwhile a telegram had gone to Daddy and the messenger who delivered it heard a volume of picturesque comment that was startling even on a Texas ranch.

"Am coming," ran the answering dispatch received by Miss Ryder that night; but it was not until morning that Bonita was able to understand the news.

"He's scared, but I know he's glad," she said and she swallowed without a murmur the broth against which even in her delirium she had fought.

One evening, three days later, a hansom dashed up to the school and out jumped a tall, square-shouldered man in a wide-brimmed hat, and clothes that bore only a family resemblance to the clothing of the New York millionaires, though they were good clothes in their own free-and-easy way.

A loud, hearty voice inquiring for "My baby" made itself heard even in the sickroom, and a sudden light flashed into the little patient's eyes--a light that was an illumination and a revelation.

"Daddy," she said wearily, and the word was a heart-throb.

Mr. Allen wasted no time in a polite interview with Miss Ryder. Hypnotized by his masterfulness, the servant led him directly up to the sick-room and opened the door.

The man filled the room; a high breeze seemed to come with him, and vitality flowed from him in tangible waves. Belinda smiled, but there were tears in her eyes, for the big man's heart was in his face.

"Baby!"

"Daddy!"

Belinda remembered an errand downstairs.

When she returned the big Texan was sitting on the side of the bed with both the lean little hands in one of his big brawny ones, while his other hand awkwardly smoothed the straight black hair.

"When will you take me home, Daddy?" said the child with the shining eyes.

"As soon as you're strong enough, Honey. The boys wanted me to let them charge New York in a bunch and get you. It's been mighty lonesome on that ranch. I wish to heaven I'd never been fool enough to let you come away."

He turned to Belinda with a quizzical smile sitting oddly on his anxious face.

"I reckon she might as well go, miss. I sent her to a finishing school, and by thunder, she's just about finished."

There was a certain hint of pride in his voice as he added reflectively:

"I might have known if she said she'd have to come home she meant it. Harder to change her mind than to bust any broncho I ever tackled. Queer Little Thing, Baby is."

RODNEY by Joseph Seamon Cotter
from Negro Tales, EBook #41590

Rodney was an illegitimate child. He knew not what this meant, but the sting of it embittered his young life.

The Negro has as much prejudice as the white man. Under like conditions the negro would make the same laws against the white. This crept out in the treatment of Rodney. His worst enemies were always negroes. The Anglo-Saxon blood in his veins made scoffers of some and demons of others.

To be pitied is the boy who has never framed the word "father" upon his lips. Rodney attempted it once, but failed, and never tried it again. He stood before his father bareheaded and with the coveted word upon his lips.

"You have a fine head of hair," said his father.

"That's what people say," replied Rodney.

"Are you proud of it?"

"Should I not be, sir?"

"Well, my little man, it's a disgrace to you."

This was the first and last meeting of Rodney and his father.

Once two fine ladies of ebony hue visited his mother, to show their

silk dresses and to take dinner. A large dish of parched horse-corn was placed in the center of the table. His mother said a solemn blessing, and the ladies looked vexed.

"My dear people," she said, after looking them into a smile, "if you are good, this is good enough. If you are not good, it is too good. In either case, help yourselves."

Rodney learned from this and similar incidents to make the most of a bad case.

"A little corn, if you please," said one. She was helped plentifully by Rodney's mother.

"Give me a part of yours," said the second to the first. She received about four-fifths of it.

"You are too generous," said Rodney's mother, and refilled the plate.

Rodney sat on the floor, stroked his cat, and eyed the fine dresses. The ladies munched with dignity, or fingered the laces on their sleeves.

"I see Rodney has had the smallpox," said one.

"Yes," replied his mother.

"My boy had it, too."

"How did it serve him?"

"It killed him. All the good children die. It was a sad stroke to me. Well, since his death I have been able to dress like a lady."

"Like a lady!" said the other. "How my old mistress used to say that word. I caught the inspiration then. It lingered in my bones a long time before it crept out thus."

Here she surveyed her clothing with satisfaction.

"I see that parched horse-corn and fine dresses go well together," said Rodney's mother, as she helped their empty plates.

"You see we are considerate," said one.

"Yes, and ladylike," said the second.

"Yes, and patched with the blue and the gray," said Rodney's mother.

They looked at their clothes, but saw not the point.

"Mother," said Rodney, lying flat on his back, hugging the cat, and beating his heels upon the floor, "what is fine lace worth a yard?"

"What is it worth, ladies?" said she.

They looked at each other and frowned.

"Rodney has begun, ladies. Be prepared," said his mother.

Here she emptied the last of the corn into her visitors' plates.

"When I washed for Mrs. Rodman a few months ago she had beautiful lace on her pillow slips."

"Yes, she did, mother," said Rodney. Then, turning to the two women: "You ladies work for her now. You cook, and you wash. She and her daughter, General Bradford's wife, have gone to the springs. Did it take all the pillow-slip lace for your sleeves?"

"Don't be too plain, Rodney," said his mother.

"Mother, that's the dress General Bradford gave his wife. You know she told you about it. Mother, mother, what did you mean when you said that the ladies are patched with the blue and the gray?"

"Mrs. Rodman is of the North. General Bradford is of the South. One

means the blue, the other the gray."

"If we are wearing things that belong to the blue and the gray, we are not patched," said one, as she arose from the table and put on her hat.

"No," said the other, "we are ladies when we are dressed so."

"That hat!" said Rodney.

The other one put her hat behind her.

"That one, too!" roared Rodney.

"Look after your half-white brat," said they.

"Look after your bare heads when Mrs. Rodman and her daughter return," said Rodney's mother.

"Now," said one, "I believe what the fortune-teller said."

"Tell it," said the other.

"I lost some money."

"Yes, you did," said the other.

"I went to the fortune-teller."

"I went with you."

"She pointed out a half-white brat."

"She then pointed out his mother."

"She said we would all meet some day."

"Now we have met."

"What did she say about parched corn?" asked Rodney's mother.

"She said a half-white brat stole the money."

"She said he would die, too," joined in the other.

"That's all plain enough," said Rodney's mother.

"Your boy is dead, and you know about his father."

"Now," said the one with the hat behind her, "I don't blame Uncle Jack for choking your brat."

"Nor Aunt Sally for throwing hot soup on him," said the other.

"Uncle Jack and Aunt Sally," said Rodney's mother, "will be important witnesses when Mrs. Rodman and her daughter return. They know all, and will tell more."

One of the ladies picked up a glass.

"How's your cat, my son?"

"My cat's nice and good and sweet."

Here both ladies spat into the glass.

"Cats are respectable and worth talking about, my son."

"This we leave with you," said the one with the hat behind her, as she set the glass upon the table.

"What do you take with you?" asked Rodney's mother.

Both looked around a second. "Corn in our stomachs," said they.

"Are the ladies insulted, mother?"

"They are dull and nasty, my boy."

The ladies hurried out, one knocking over a chair, the other deliberately pulling down a picture.

"Here, mother," said Rodney, bringing her a comb and brush, "tidy up my cat. Mary's coming with her doll." The mother combed and brushed the cat, while Rodney jumped on and off the table for joy. In the meantime Professor Brandon was conversing with the ladies on the outside.

"Ladies! ladies!" said he.

"Ha! ha!" was the response.

"Let it flow right along," continued the professor.

"We'll be generous enough," said they.

"Ladies, those poses are superb."

"Professor, you can judge."

"No one doubts it, ladies."

"Professor, I need words just now," said one of them.

"Professor, I need a professor," said the other.

"That's epidemic, ladies."

Little Mary entered the room and ran around holding her doll by one foot. "Oh! oh! oh!" said she.

"Is your doll hurt?" asked Rodney, following her around the room with his cat in his arms.

"No, no, no," replied she.

"A cat for a doll," said Rodney.

"I must tell it first," gasped Mary.

"Go on, while I fan you with my cat, Mary!"

"The professor and the ladies--are drinking--from--a big black bottle."

"Let's see," said Rodney, as he ran to the door and peeped. Mary followed and stood behind him.

"Ha! ha! let it flow right along," came from without.

Rodney held up his cat for a bottle and made a gurgling sound. Mary held up her doll and imitated him.

The professor now parted from the ladies and approached Rodney's home. As he walked into the room Rodney and Mary sat upon the floor and exchanged the cat and doll.

"I am Professor Brandon," said he, pulling his mustache.

Rodney went through the motion of pulling his, and Mary pulled the cat's.

"'Tis delightful to meet ladies," said he.

Rodney's mother nodded.

"Schoolteaching would be unbearable were it not for meeting ladies."

"Must you have the big black bottle every time?" asked Mary.

Here Rodney held up the doll and made a drinking noise.

"These young ones need curbing," said the professor.

"So do appetites, sir," replied Rodney's mother.

"I am a schoolteacher, madam," roared he.

"I am a washerwoman, sir," was her reply.

"Very well, I'll give you a job. What can you wash?"

"Shirts."

"What else?"

"Drawers."

"What else?"

"Socks."

"What else?"

"Diapers, sir."

"You are brutally plain, madam."

"You are devilishly inconsiderate and inquisitive, sir."

Both children emphasized the remark by beating upon the floor.

"To my business," said the professor. "This boy should be at school. Where is his father?"

"I ask you the same question, sir."

"Madam, that leads me to suspect."

"What does 'suspect' mean, professor?" asked Mary.

"It means--the Latin of it is--let's see----"

The professor stopped to pull his mustache.

"It means to dream out something and swear it's true," spoke up Rodney's mother.

"Madam, I want to talk to you about this boy's schooling. Have you any drinking water?"

"No. Rodney, a bucket of water."

"A bucket of water, Rodney. Go fast and return slowly," put in the professor.

Rodney started briskly, but Mary held him back and looked saucily at the professor.

"Let's bring back the bottle," laughed she, as both ran out.

"First, madam, I am a professor. I hold a diploma from a college."

"You carry it with you?"

"Sometimes."

"You have shown it to leading white men?"

"Yes."

"Well, many a good-meaning white man has been deceived by a college diploma in the hands of a negro."

"You presume too far on your limited knowledge."

"You travel too far on your flimsy diploma."

"Secondly, madam, I would elevate the morals of the race."

"Very good, sir. How?"

"I would begin by cutting off from society every illegitimate negro child."

"You would, in so doing, train your thumb and finger to pinch your own nose."

"My mother and father were married, madam."

"Your mother and her husband were married."

"Madam, I came in the interest of your child's education."

"You are a liar from the roots of your hair to your toe-nails. You came to pry into my private life and to take note of my mental stock. You may proceed, sir."

"I haven't time to stay."

"You have a sufficient supply with which to go."

"If you were a lady, I would say prate on."

"If you were a merchant, I would say speak tersely, weigh justly, and keep ever in mind a marble monument."

"If you were a poet I would say tear out and fling to the crowd as much of your heart as you would have the crowd return. If you were a philosopher I would say weaken not your philosophy with wit, nor weigh down your wit with philosophy. Philosophy and wit are good neighbors, but indifferent twins. Since you are a fool, I will simply say all remedies have failed, and you are happy and safe in your ancient calling."

Professor Brandon pulled his mustache a few seconds. He then said: "For your peace of mind, I will go."

Rodney entered with a pitcher of water, and Mary with a big black

bottle.

"Have water, professor?" asked Rodney. Here Mary pretended to drink from the bottle. The professor took the pitcher and poured some of the water into the glass into which the ladies had spat some time before. He held it at some distance from him and said: "Woman's tedious, but pure water is wholesome."

"Professor!" roared Rodney's mother.

"You are just and polite, at last," calmly observed he.

"What's in the glass, sir? Examine the glass."

"That is best done in the dish-water."

The professor was about to drink it when he saw the spittle.

"You did this, boy?"

"I was holding Mary's doll, professor," gasped Rodney.

"Was it you, girl?"

"I was holding Rodney's cat and your big black bottle, professor," slyly replied Mary.

"You, madam?"

"Be calm, professor. That is the compliments of your fine ladies, without whom schoolteaching would be unbearable."

"They spat into this glass?"

"No, professor," retorted Mary. "Rodney said they puked into it."

"They had a mighty big stomach full of corn, anyway," put in Rodney.

The professor dropped the glass and stepped out of the door, seemingly very uneasy about the stomach.

"Professor," called Rodney's mother.

He stopped and grunted.

"Your attitude is undignified, sir."

He started to answer, but his mouth was too full. Rodney's mother walked to the door backwards and closed it.

"You did that, Mary," said Rodney.

"How?" retorted Mary.

"I didn't say they puked into the glass. I said they spat into it."

"It's all one, Master Rodney, and give me my doll."

"I won't. Give me my cat."

"I won't. My doll."

"My cat."

They tugged at the doll and cat. Rodney's mother threw her arms around them, and said soothingly: "My Rodney and his little sweetheart, Mary!"

A STOLEN FESTIVAL by Alice Brown
from Tiverton Tales, EBook #9370

David Macy's house stood on the spur of a breezy upland at the end of a road. The faraway neighbors, who lived on the main highway and could see the passin', often thanked their stars that they had been called to no such isolation; you might, said they, as well be set down in the middle of pastur'. They wondered how David's Letty could stand it. She had been married 'most a year, and before that she was forever on the go. But there! if David Macy had told her the sun rose in the west, she'd ha' looked out for it there every identical mornin'.

The last proposition had some color in it; for Letty was very much in love. To an impartial view, David was a stalwart fellow with clear gray eyes and square shoulders, a prosperous yeoman of the fibre to which America owes her being. But according to Letty he was something superhuman in poise and charm. David had no conception of his heroic responsibilities; nothing could have puzzled him more than to guess how the ideal of him grew and strengthened in her maiden mind, and how her after-worship exalted it into something thrilling and passionate, not to be described even by a tongue more facile than hers. Letty had a vivid nature, capable of responding to those delicate influences which move to spiritual issues. There were throes of love within her, of aspiration, of an ineffable delight in being. She never tried to understand them, nor did she talk about them; but then, she never tried to paint the sky or copy the robin's song. Life was very mysterious; but one thing was quite as mysterious as another. She did sometimes brood for a moment over the troubled sense that, in some fashion, she spoke in another key from "other folks," who did not appear to know that joy is not altogether joy, but three-quarters pain, and who had never learned how it brings its own aching sense of incompleteness; but that only seemed to her a part of the general wonder of things. There had been one strange May morning in her life when she went with her husband into the woods, to hunt up a wild steer. She knew every foot of the place, and yet one turn of the path brought them into the heart of a picture thrillingly new with the unfamiliarity of pure and living beauty. The evergreens enfolded them in a palpable dusk; but entrancingly near, shimmering under a sunny gleam, stood a company of

birches in their first spring wear. They were trembling, not so much under the breeze as from the hurrying rhythm of the year. Their green was vivid enough to lave the vision in light; and Letty looked beyond it to a brighter vista still. There, in an opening, lay a bank of violets, springing in the sun. Their blue was a challenge to the skyey blue above; it pierced the sight, awaking new longings and strange memories. It seemed to Letty as if some invisible finger touched her on the heart and made her pause. Then David turned, smiling kindly upon her, and she ran to him with a little cry, and put her arms about his neck.

"What is it?" he asked, stroking her hair with a gentle hand. "What is it, little child?"

"Oh, it's nothin'!" said Letty chokingly. "It's only--I like you so!"

The halting thought had no purple wherein to clothe itself; but it meant as much as if she had read the poets until great words had become familiar, and she could say "love." He was the spring day, the sun, the blue of the sky, the quiver of leaves; and she felt it, and had a pain at her heart.

Now, on an autumn morning, David was standing within the great space in front of the barn, greasing the wheels preliminary to a drive to market; and Letty stood beside him, bareheaded, her breakfast dishes forgotten. She was a round thing, with quick movements not ordinarily belonging to one so plump; her black hair was short, and curled roughly, and there were freckles on her little snub nose. David looked up at her red cheeks and the merry shine of her eyes, and smiled upon her.

"You look pretty nice this mornin'," he remarked.

Letty gave a little dancing step and laughed. The sun was bright; there was a purple haze over the hills, and the nearer woods were yellow. The world was a jewel newly set for her.

"I _am_ nice!" said she. "David, do you know our anniversary's comin' "

on? It's 'most a year since we were married,--a year the fifteenth."

David loosened the last wheel, and rose to look at her.

"Sho!" said he, with great interest "Is that so? Well, 't was a good bargain. Best trade I ever made in _my_ life!"

"And we've got to celebrate," said Letty masterfully. "I'll tell you how. I've had it all planned for a month. We'll get up at four, have our breakfast, ride over to Star Pond, and picnic all day long. We'll take a boat and go out rowin', and we'll eat our dinner on the water!"

David smiled back at her, and then, with a sudden recollection, pursed his lips.

"I'm awful sorry, Letty," he said honestly, "but I've got to go over to Long Pastur' an' do that fencin', or I can't put the cattle in there before we turn 'em into the shack. You know that fence was all done up in the spring, but that cussed breachy cow o' Tolman's hooked it down; an' if I wait for him to do it--well, you know what he is!"

"Oh, you can put off your fencin'!" cried Letty. "Only one day! Oh, you can!"

"I could 'most any other time," said David, with reason, "but here it is 'most Saturday, an' next week the thrashin'-machine's comin'. I'm awful sorry, Letty. I am, honest!"

Letty turned half round like a troubled child, and began grinding one heel into the turf. She was conscious of an odd mortification. It was not, said her heart, that the thing itself was so dear to her; it was only that David ought to want immeasurably to do it. She always put great stress upon the visible signs of an invisible bond, and she would be long in getting over her demand for the unreason of love.

David threw down the monkey-wrench, and put an arm about her waist.

"Come, now, you don't care, do you?" he asked lovingly. "One day's the

same as another, now ain't it?"

"Is it?" said Letty, a smile running over her face and into her wet eyes. "Well, then, le's have Fourth o' July fireworks next Sunday mornin'!"

David looked a little hurt; but that was only because he was puzzled. His sense of humor wore a different complexion from Letty's. He liked a joke, and he could tell a good story, but they must lie within the logic of fun. Letty could put her own interpretation on her griefs, and twist them into shapes calculated to send her into hysterical mirth.

"You see," said David soothingly, "we're goin' to be together as long as we live. It ain't as if we'd got to rake an' scrape an' plan to git a minute alone, as it used to be, now is it? An' after the fencin' 's done, an' the thrashin', an' we've got nothin' on our minds, we'll take both horses an' go to Star Pond. Come, now! Be a good girl!"

The world seemed very quiet because Letty was holding silence, and he looked anxiously down at the top of her head. Then she relented a little and turned her face up to his--her rebellious eyes and unsteady mouth. But meeting the loving honesty of his look, her heart gave a great bound of allegiance, and she laughed aloud.

"There!" she said. "Have it so. I won't say another word. _I_ don't care!"

These were David's unconscious victories, born, not of his strength or tyranny, but out of the woman's maternal comprehension, her lavish concession of all the small things of life to the one great code. She had taken him for granted, and thenceforth judged him by the intention and not the act.

David was bending to kiss her, but he stopped midway, and his arm fell.

"There's Debby Low," said he. "By jinks! I ain't more 'n half a man when she's round, she makes me feel so sheepish. I guess it's that eye o' her'n. It goes through ye like a needle."

Letty laughed light-heartedly, and looked down the path across the lot. Debby, a little, bent old woman, was toiling slowly along, a large carpet-bag swinging from one hand. Letty drew a long breath and tried to feel resigned.

"She's got on her black alpaca," said she. "She's comin' to spend the day!"

David answered her look with one of commiseration, and, gathering up his wrench and oil, "put for" the barn.

"I'd stay, if I could do any good," he said hastily, "but I can't. I might as well stan' from under."

Debby threw her empty carpet-bag over the stone wall, and followed it, clambering slowly and painfully. Her large feet were clad in congress boots; and when she had alighted, she regarded them with deep affection, and slowly wiped them upon either ankle, a stork-like process at which David, safe in the barn, could afford to smile.

"If it don't rain soon," she called fretfully, "I guess you'll find yourselves alone an' forsaken, like pelicans in the wilderness. Anybody must want to see ye to traipse up through that lot as I've been doin', an' git their best clo'es all over dirt."

"You could ha' come in the road," said Letty, smiling. Letty had a very sweet temper, and she had early learned that it takes all sorts o' folks to make a world. It was a part of her leisurely and generous scheme of life to live and let live.

"Ain't the road dustier 'n the path?" inquired Debby contradictorily.

"My stars! I guess 't is. Well, now, what do you s'pose brought me up here this mornin'?"

Letty's eyes involuntarily sought the bag, whose concave sides flapped hungrily together; but she told her lie with cheerfulness. "I don't know."

"I guess ye don't. No, I ain't comin' in. I'm goin' over to Mis' Tolman's, to spend the day. I'm in hopes she's got b'iled dish. You look here!" She opened the bag, and searched portentously, the while Letty, in some unworthy interest, regarded the smooth, thick hair under her large poke-bonnet. Debby had an original fashion of coloring it; and this no one had suspected until her little grandson innocently revealed the secret. She rubbed it with a candle, in unconscious imitation of an actor's make-up, and then powdered it with soot from the kettle. "I believe to my soul she does!" said Letty to herself.

But Debby, breathing hard, had taken something from the bag, and was holding it out on the end of a knotted finger.

"There!" she said, "ain't that your'n? Vianna said 't was your engagement ring."

Letty flushed scarlet, and snatched the ring tremblingly. She gave an involuntary look at the barn, where David was whistling a merry stave.

"Oh, my!" she breathed. "Where'd you find it?"

"Well, that's the question!" returned Debby triumphantly, "Where'd ye lose it?"

But Letty had no mind to tell. She slipped the ring on her finger, and looked obstinate.

"Can't I get you somethin' to put in your bag?" she asked cannily. Debby was diverted, though only for the moment.

"I should like a mite o' pork," she answered, lowering her voice and giving a glance, in her turn, at the barn. "I s'pose ye don't want _him_ to know of it?"

"I should like to be told why!" flamed Letty, in an indignation disproportioned to its cause. Debby had unconsciously hit the raw. "Do you s'pose I'd do anything David can't hear?"

"Law, I didn't know," said Debby, as if the matter were of very little consequence. "Mis' Peleg Chase, she gi'n me a beef-bone, t'other day, an' she says, 'Don't ye tell _him_!' An' Mis' Squire Hill gi'n me a pail o' lard; but she hid it underneath the fence, an' made me come for 't after dark. I dunno how you're goin' to git along with men-folks, if ye offer 'em the whip-hand. They'll take it, anyways. Well, don't you want to know where I come on this ring?"

Letty had taken a few hasty steps toward the house. "Yes, I do," owned she, turning about. "Where was it?"

"Well, Sammy was in swimmin', an' he dove into the Old Hole, to see 'f 't had any bottom to 't. Vianna made him vow he wouldn't go in whilst he had that rash; but he come home with his shirt wrong side out, an' she made him own up. But he'd ha' told anyway, he was so possessed to show that ring. He see suthin' gleamin' on a willer root nigh the bank, an' he dove, an' there 't was. I told Sammy mebbe you'd give him suthin' for 't, an' he said there wa'n't nothin' in the world he wanted but a mite o' David's solder, out in the shed-chamber."

"He shall have it," said Letty hastily. "I'll get it now. Don't you say anything!" And then she knew she had used the formula she detested, and that she was no better than Mrs. Peleg Chase, or the wife of Squire Hill.

She ran frowning into the house, and down and up from kitchen to cellar. Presently she reappeared, panting, with a great tin pan borne before her like a laden salver. She set it down at Debby's feet, and began packing its contents into the yawning bag.

"There!" she said, working with haste. "There's the solder, all of it. And here's some of our sweet corn. We planted late."

Debby took an ear from the pan, and, tearing open the husk, tried a kernel with a critical thumb.

"Tough, ain't it?" she remarked, disparagingly. "Likely to be, this

time o' year. Is that the pork?"

It was a generous cube, swathed in a fresh white cloth.

"Yes, it is," said Letty breathlessly, thrusting it in and shutting the bag. "There!"

"Streak o' fat an' streak o' lean?" inquired Debby remorselessly.

"It's the best we've got; that's all I can say. Now I've got to speak to David before he harnesses. Good-by!"

In a fever of impatience, she fled away to the barn.

"Well, if ever!" ejaculated Debby, lifting the bag and turning slowly about, to take her homeward path. "Great doin's _I_ say!" And she made no reply when Letty, prompted by a tardy conscience, stopped in the barn doorway and called to her, "Tell Sammy I'm much obliged. Tell him I shall make turnovers to-morrow." Debby was thinking of the pork, and the likelihood of its being properly diversified.

Letty swept into the barn like a hurrying wind. The horses backed, and laid their ears flat, and David, grooming one of them, gentled him and inquired of him confidentially what was the matter.

"Oh, David, come out here! please come out!" called Letty breathlessly. "I've got to see you."

David appeared, with some wonderment on his face, and Letty precipitated herself upon him, mindless of curry-comb and horse-hairs and the fact that she was presently to do butter. "David," she cried, "I can't stand it. I've got to tell you. You know this ring?"

David looked at it, interested and yet perplexed.

"Seems if I'd seen you wear it," said he.

Letty gave way, and laughed hysterically.

"Seems if you had!" she repeated. "I've wore it over a year. There ain't a girl in town but knows it. I showed it to 'em all. I told 'em 'twas my engagement ring."

David looked at it, and then at her. She seemed to him a little mad. He could quiet the horses, but not a woman, in so vague an exigency.

"What made you tell 'em that?" he asked, at a venture.

"Don't you see? There wasn't one of 'em that was engaged but had a ring--and presents, David--and they knew I never had anything, or I'd have showed 'em."

David was not a dull man; he had very sound views on the tariff, and, though social questions might thrive outside his world, the town blessed him for an able citizen. But he felt troubled; he was condemned, and it was the world's voice which had condemned him.

"I don't know's I ever did give you anything, Letty," he said, with a new pain stirring in his face. "I don't b'lieve I ever thought of it. It wasn't that I begrudged anything."

"Oh, my soul, no!" cried Letty, in an agony of her own. "I knew how 't was. It wa'n't your way, but they didn't know that. And I couldn't have 'em thinkin' what they did think, now could I? So I bought me--David, I bought me that high comb I used to wear, and--and a blue handkerchief--and a thimble--and--and--this ring. And I said you give 'em to me. And I trusted to chance for your never findin' it out. But I always hated the things; and as soon as we were married, I broke the comb, and burnt up the handkerchief, and hammered the thimble into a little wad, and buried it. But I didn't dare to stop wearin' the ring, for fear folks would notice. Then t'other day I felt so about it I knew the time had come, and I went down to the Old Hole and threw it in. And now that hateful Sammy's found it and brought it back, and I've sent him your solder, and Debby's promised me she wouldn't tell you about the pork, and I--I'm no better than the rest of 'em that lie and lie and don't let their men-folks know!" Letty was sobbing bitterly,

and David drew her into his arms and laid his cheek down on her hair. His heart was aching too. They had all the passionate sorrow of children over some grief not understood.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked at length.

"When?" said Letty chokingly.

"Then--when folks expected things--before we were married."

"Oh, David, I couldn't!"

"No," said David sadly, "I s'pose you couldn't."

Letty had been holding one hand very tightly clenched. It was a plump hand, with deep dimples and firm, short fingers. She unclasped it, and stretched out toward him a wet, pink palm.

"There!" she said despairingly. "There's the ring."

Again David felt his inadequacy to the situation. "Don't you want to wear it?" he hesitated. "It's real pretty. What's that red stone?"

"I hate it!" cried Letty viciously. "It's a garnet. Oh, David, don't you ever let me set eyes on it again!"

David took it slowly from her hand. He drew out his pocket-book, opened it, and dropped the ring inside. "There!" he said, "I guess't won't do me no hurt to come acrost it once in a while." Then they kissed each other again, like two children; Letty's tears wet his face, and he felt them bitterer than if they had been his own.

But for Letty the air had cleared. Now, she felt, there was no trouble in her path. She had all the irresponsible joy of one who has had a secret, and feels the burden roll away. She was like Christian without his pack. She put her hands on David's shoulders, and looked at him radiantly.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried. "I'm just as wicked as I was before; but it don't seem to make any difference, now you know it!"

Though David also smiled, he was regarding her with a troubled wonder. He never expected to follow these varying moods. They were like swallow-flights, and he was content to see the sun upon their wings. So he drove thoughtfully off, and Letty went back to her work with a singing heart. She was not quite sure that it was right to be happy again, all at once, but she could not still her blood. To be forgiven, to find herself free from the haunting consciousness that she could deceive the creature to whom she held such passionate allegiance--this was enough to shape a new heaven and a new earth. Her simple household duties took on the significance of noble ceremonies. She sang as she went about them, and the words were those of a joyous hymn. She seemed to be serving in a temple, making it clean and fragrant in the name of love.

Saturday was a day born of heavenly intentions. Letty ran out behind the house, where the ground rose abruptly, and looked off, entranced, into the blue distance. It was the stillest day of all the fall. Not a breath stirred about her; but in the maple grove at the side of the house, where the trees had turned early under the chill of an unseasonable night, yellow leaves were sifting down without a sound. Goldenrod was growing dull, clematis had ripened into feathery spray, and she knew how the closed gentians were painting great purple dashes by the side of the road. "Oh!" she cried aloud, in rapture. It was her wedding day; a year ago the sun had shone as warmly and benignantly as he was shining now, and the same haze had risen, like an exhalation, from the hills. She saw a special omen in it, and felt herself the child of happy fortune, to be so mothered by the great blue sky. Then she ran in to give David his breakfast, and tell him, as they sat down, that it was their wedding morning. As she went, she tore a spray of blood-red woodbine from the wall, and bound it round her waist.

But David was not ready for breakfast; he was talking with a man at the barn, and half an hour later came hurrying in to his retarded meal.

"I've got to eat an' run," said he; "Job Fisher kep' me. It's about

that ma'sh. But the time wa'n't wasted. He'll sell ten acres for twenty dollars less'n he said last week. Too bad to keep you waitin'! You'd ought to eat yours while't was hot."

Letty, with a little smile all to herself, sat demurely down and poured coffee; this was no time to talk of anniversaries. David ate in haste, and said good-by.

"I'm goin' down the lot to get my withes," said he. "Whilst I'm gone, you put me up a mite o' luncheon, I sha'n't lay off to come home till night."

"Oh, David!" said Letty, with a little cry. Then the same knowing smile crept over her face. "No, I sha'n't," added she willfully. "I'm goin' to bring it to you."

"Fetch me my dinner? Why, it's a mile and a half 'cross lots! I guess you won't!"

"You go right along, David," said Letty decisively. "I don't want to hear another word. I ain't seen the Long Pastur' this summer, and I'm comin'. Good-by!" She disappeared down the cellar stairs with the butter-plate poised on a pyramid of dishes, and David, having no time to argue, went off to his work.

About ten o'clock Letty took her way down to the Long Pasture; she was a very happy woman, and she could hold her happiness before her face, regarding it frankly and with a full delight. The material joys of life might seem to escape her; but she could have them, after all. The great universe, warm with sun and warm with love, was on her side. Even the day seemed something tangible in gracious being; and as Letty trudged along, her basket on her arm, she reasoned upon her own riches and owned she had enough. David was not like anybody else; but he was better than anybody else, and he was hers. Even his faults were dearer than other men's virtues. She heard the sound of his axe upon the stakes, breaking the lovely stillness with a significance lovelier still.

"David!" she called, long before reaching the little brook that runs beneath the bank, and he leaped the fence and came to meet her. "David!" she repeated, and looked up in his face with eyes so solemn and so full of light that he held her still a moment to look at her.

"Letty," he said, "you're real pretty!" And then they both laughed, and walked on together through the shade.

The day knit up its sweet, long minutes full of the serious beauty of the woods. David worked hard, and for a time Letty lingered near him; then she strayed away, and came back to him, from moment to moment, with wonderful treasures. Now it was cress from the spring, now a palm-full of partridge berries, or a cluster of checkerberry leaves for a "cud," or a bit of wood-sorrel. By and by the fall stillness gave out a breath of heat, and the sun stood high overhead. Letty spread out her dinner, and David made her a fire among the rocks. The smoke rose in a blue efflorescence; and with the sweet tang of burning wood yet in the air, they sat down side by side, drinking from one cup, and smiling over the foolish nothings of familiar talk. At the end of the meal, Letty took a parcel from the basket, something wrapped in a very fine white napkin. She flushed a little, unrolling it, and her eyes deepened.

"What's all this?" asked David, sniffing the air. "Fruit-cake?"

Letty nodded without looking at him; there was a telltale quivering in her face. She divided the cake carefully, and gave her husband half. David had lain back on a piny bank; and as he ate, his eyes followed the treetops, swaying a little now in a rhythmic wind. But Letty ate her piece as if it were sacramental bread. She put out her hand to him, and he stroked the short, faithful fingers, and then held them close. He smiled at her; and for a moment he mused again over that starry light in her eyes. Then his lids fell, and he had a little nap, while Letty sat and dreamed back over the hours, a year and more ago, when her mother's house smelled of spices, and this cake was baked for her wedding day.

When they went home again, side by side, the fencing was all done, and

David had an after-consciousness of happy playtime. He carried the basket, with his axe, and Letty, like an untired little dog, took brief excursions of discovery here and there, and came back to his side with her weedy treasures. Once--was it something in the air?--he called to her:--

"Say, Letty, wa'n't it about this kind o' weather the day we were married?"

But Letty gave a little cry, and pointed out a frail white butterfly on a mullein leaf. "See there, David! how cold he looks! I'd like to take him along. He'll freeze to-night." David forgot his question, and she was glad. Some inner voice was at her heart, warning her to leave the day unspoiled. Her joy lay in remembering; it seemed a small thing to her that he should forget.

"We've had a real good time," he said, as he gave her the basket at the kitchen door. "Now, as soon as thrashin' 's done, we'll go to Star Pond."

After supper they covered up the squashes, for fear of a frost; and then they stood for a moment in the field, and looked at the harvest moon, risen in a great effrontery of splendor.

"Letty," asked David suddenly, "shouldn't you like to put on your little ring? It's right here in my pocket."

"No! no!" said Letty hastily. "I never want to set eyes on it again."

"I guess I'll get you another one 't you could wear. I looked t'other day when I went to market; but there was so many I didn't das't to make a choice unless you was with me."

Letty clung to him passionately. "Oh, David," she cried, with a break in her voice, "I don't want any rings. I want just you."

David put out one hand and softly touched the little blue kerchief about her head. "Anyway," he said, "we won't have any more secrets from

one another, will we?"

Letty gave a little start, and she caught her breath before answering:--

"No, we won't--not unless they're nice ones!"

The Man who Called the Buffalo

This happened in the olden time before we had met the white people. Then the different bands lived in separate villages. The lodges were made of dirt. The Kit-ke-hahk'-i band went off on a winter hunt, roaming over the country, as they used to do, after buffalo. At this time they did not find the buffalo near. They scouted in all directions, but could discover no signs of them. It was a hard time of starvation. The children cried and the women cried; they had nothing at all to eat.

There was a person who looked at the children crying for something to eat, and it touched his heart. They were very poor, and he felt sorry for them. He said to the Head Chief, "Tell the chiefs and other head men to do what I tell them. My heart is sick on account of the suffering of the people. It may be that I can help them. Let a new lodge be set up outside the village for us to meet in. I will see if I can do anything to relieve the tribe." The Chief said that it was well to do this, and he gave orders for it.

While they were preparing to build this lodge they would miss this man in the night. He would disappear like a wind, and go off a long way, and just as daylight came, he would be there again. Sometimes, while sitting in his own lodge during the day, he would reach behind him, and bring out a small piece of buffalo meat, fat and lean, and would give it to some one, saying, "When you have had enough, save what is left, and give it to some one else." When he would give this small piece of meat to any one, the person would think, "This is not enough to satisfy my hunger;" but after eating until he was full, there was always enough left to give to some other person.

In those days it was the custom for the Head Chief of the tribe, once in a while, to mount his horse, and ride about through the village, talking to the people, and giving them good advice, and telling them

that they ought to do what was right by each other. At this time the Chief spoke to the people, and explained that this man was going to try to benefit the tribe. So the people made him many fine presents, otter skins and eagle feathers, and when they gave him these things each one said, "I give you this. It is for yourself. Try to help us." He thanked them for these presents, and when they were all gathered together he said, "Now you chiefs and head men of the tribe, and you people, you have done well to give me these things. I shall give them to that person who gives me that power, and who has taken pity on me. I shall let you starve yet four days. Then help will come."

During these four days, every day and night he disappeared, but would come back the same night. He would say to the people that he had been far off, where it would take a person three or four days to go, but he was always back the same night. When he got back on the fourth night, he told the people that the buffalo were near, that the next morning they would be but a little way off. He went up on the hill near the camp, and sacrificed some eagle feathers, and some blue beads, and some Indian tobacco, and then returned to the camp. Then he said to the people, "When that object comes to that place of sacrifice, do not interfere with it; do not turn it back. Let it go by. Just watch and see."

The next morning at daylight, all the people came out of their lodges to watch this hill, and the place where he had sacrificed. While they were looking they saw a great buffalo bull come up over the hill to the place. He stood there for a short time and looked about, and then he walked on down the hill, and went galloping off past the village. Then this man spoke to the people, and said, "There. That is what I meant. That is the leader of the buffalo; where he went the whole herd will follow."

He sent his servant to the chiefs to tell them to choose four boys, and let them go to the top of the hill where the bull had come over, and to look beyond it. The boys were sent, and ran to the top of the hill, and when they looked over beyond it they stopped, and then turned, and came back, running. They went to the chiefs' lodge, and said to the chiefs sitting there, "Beyond that place of sacrifice

there is coming a whole herd of buffalo; many, many, crowding and pushing each other."

Then, as it used to be in the old times, as soon as the young men had told the Chief that the buffalo were coming, the Chief rode about the village, and told every one to get ready to chase them. He said to them besides, "Do not leave anything on the killing ground. Bring into the camp not only the meat and hides, but the heads and legs and all parts. Bring the best portions in first, and take them over to the new lodge, so that we may have a feast there." For so the man had directed.

Presently the buffalo came over the hill, and the people were ready, and they made a surround, and killed all that they could, and brought them home. Each man brought in his ribs and his young buffalo, and left them there at that lodge. The other parts they brought into the village, as he had directed. After they had brought in this meat, they went to the lodge, and staid there four days and four nights, and had a great feast, roasting these ribs. The man told them that they would make four surrounds like this, and to get all the meat that they could, "But," he said, "in surrounding these buffalo you must see that all the meat is saved. _Ti-ra'-wa_ does not like the people to waste the buffalo, and for that reason I advise you to make good use of all you kill." During the four nights they feasted this man used to disappear each night.

On the night of the fourth day he said to the people, "To-morrow the buffalo will come again, and you will make another surround. Be careful not to kill a yellow calf--a little one--that you will see with the herd, nor its mother." This was in winter, and yet the calf was the same color as a young calf born in the spring. They made the surround, and let the yellow calf and its mother go.

A good many men in the tribe saw that this man was great, and that he had done great things for the tribe, and they made him many presents, the best horses that they had. He thanked them, but he did not want to accept the presents. The tribe believed that he had done this wonderful thing--had brought them buffalo--and all the people wanted

to do just what he told them to.

In the first two surrounds they killed many buffalo, and made much dried meat. All their sacks were full, and the dried meat was piled up out of doors. After the second surround, they feasted as before.

After four days, as they were going out to surround the buffalo the third time, the wind changed, and before the people got near them, the buffalo smelt them, and stampeded. While they were galloping away, the man ran up on to the top of the hill, to the place of sacrifice, carrying a pole, on which was tied the skin of a kit fox; and when he saw the buffalo running, and that the people could not catch them, he waved his pole, and called out _Ska-a-a-a!_ and the buffalo turned right about, and charged back right through the people, and they killed many of them. He wished to show the people that he had the power over the buffalo.

After the third surround they had a great deal of meat, and he called the chiefs together and said, "Now, my chiefs, are you satisfied?" They said, "Yes, we are satisfied, and we are thankful to you for taking pity on us and helping us. It is through your power that the tribe has been saved from starving to death." He said, "You are to make one more surround, and that will be the end. I want you to get all you can. Kill as many as possible, for this will be the last of the buffalo this winter. Those presents that you have made to me, and that I did not wish to take, I give them back to you." Some of the people would not take back the presents, but insisted that he should keep them, and at last he said he would do so.

The fourth surround was made, and the people killed many buffalo, and saved the meat. The night after this last surround, he disappeared and drove the buffalo back. The next morning he told the people to look about, and tell him if they saw anything. They did so, but they could not see any buffalo.

The next day they moved camp, and went east toward their home. They had so much dried meat that they could not take it all at once, but had to come back and make two trips for it. When they moved below,

going east, they had no fresh meat, only dried meat; but sometimes when this man would come in from his journeys, he would bring a piece of meat--a little piece--and he would divide it up among the people, and they would put it into the kettles and boil it, and everybody would eat, but they could not eat it all up. There would always be some left over. This man was so wonderful that he could change even the buffalo chips that you see on the prairie into meat. He would cover them up with his robe, and when he would take it off again, you would see there pounded buffalo meat and tallow (pemmican),
tup-o-har'-ash.

The man was not married; he was a young man, and by this time the people thought that he was one of the greatest men in the tribe, and they wanted him to marry. They went to one of the chiefs and told him that they wanted him to be this man's father-in-law, for they wanted him to raise children, thinking that they might do something to benefit the tribe. They did not want that race to die out. The old people say that it would have been good if he had had children, but he had none. If he had, perhaps they would have had the same power as their father.

That person called the buffalo twice, and twice saved the tribe from a famine. The second time the suffering was great, and they held a council to ask him to help the tribe. They filled up the pipe and held it out to him, asking him to take pity on the tribe. He took the pipe, and lighted it, and smoked. He did it in the same way as the first time, and they made four surrounds, and got much meat.

When this man died, all the people mourned for him a long time. The Chief would ride around the village and call out, "Now I am poor in mind on account of the death of this man, because he took pity on us and saved the tribe. Now he is gone and there is no one left like him."

This is a true and sacred story that belongs to the Kit-ke-hahk'-i band. It happened once long ago, and has been handed down from father to son in this band. The Skidi had a man who once called the buffalo, causing them to return when stampeded, as was done in this story.

* * * * *

Note.--Big Knife, a Skidi, who died only recently, said that the man was alive in his time. _Kuru'ks-u le-shar_ (Bear Chief), a Skidi, says that he knew the man. His name was Carrying Mother.

UNCLE BENTLEY AND THE ROOSTERS by Hayden Carruth
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The burden of Uncle Bentley has always rested heavily on our town. Having not a shadow of business to attend to he has made other people's business his own, and looked after it in season and out--especially out. If there is a thing which nobody wants done, to this Uncle Bentley applies his busy hand.

One warm summer Sunday we were all at church. Our pastor had taken the passage on turning the other cheek, or one akin to it, for his text, and was preaching on peace and quiet and non-resistance. He soon had us in a devout mood which must have been beautiful to see and encouraging to the good man.

Of course, Uncle Bentley was there--he always was, and forever in a front pew, with his neck craned up looking backward to see if there was anything that didn't need doing which he could do. He always tinkered with the fires in the winter and fussed with the windows in the summer, and did his worst with each. His strongest church point was ushering. Not content to usher the stranger within our gates, he would usher all of us, and always thrust us into pews with just the people we didn't want to sit with. If you failed to follow him when he took you in tow, he would stop and look back reproachfully, describing mighty indrawing curves with his arm; and if you pretended not to see him, he would give a low whistle to attract your attention, the arm working right along, like a Holland windmill.

On this particular warm summer Sunday Uncle Bentley was in place wearing his long, full-skirted coat, a queer, dark, bottle-green, purplish blue. He had ushered to his own exceeding joy, and got two men in one pew, and given them a single hymn-book, who wouldn't on week-days speak to each other. I ought to mention that we had long before made a verb of Uncle Bentley. To unclebentley was to do the wrong thing. It was a regular verb, unclebentley, unclebentleyed, unclebentleying. Those two rampant enemies in the same pew had been unclebentleyed.

The minister was floating along smoothly on the subject of peace when Uncle Bentley was observed to throw up his head. He had heard a sound outside. It was really nothing but one of Deacon Plummer's young roosters crowing. The Deacon lived near, and vocal offerings from his poultry were frequent and had ceased to interest any one except Uncle Bentley. Then in the pauses between the preacher's periods we heard the flapping of wings, with sudden stoppings and startings. Those unregenerate fowls, unable to understand the good man's words, were fighting. Even this didn't interest us--we were committed to peace. But Uncle Bentley shot up like a jack-in-a-box and cantered down the aisle. Of course, his notion was that the roosters were disturbing the services, and that it was his duty to go out and stop them. We heard vigorous "Shoos!" and "Take thats!" and "Consairn yous!" and then Uncle Bentley came back looking very important, and as he stalked up the aisle he glanced around and nodded his head, saying as clearly as words, "There, where would you be without me?" Another defiant crow floated in at the window.

The next moment the rushing and beating of wings began again, and down the aisle went Uncle Bentley, the long tails of that coat fairly floating like a cloud behind him. There was further uproar outside, and Uncle Bentley was back in his place, this time turning around and whispering hoarsely, "I fixed 'em!" But such was not the case, for twice more the very same thing was repeated. The last time Uncle Bentley came back he wore a calm, snug expression, as who should say, "Now I _have_ fixed 'em!" We should have liked it better if the roosters had fixed Uncle Bentley. But nobody paid much attention except Deacon Plummer. The thought occurred to him that perhaps Uncle Bentley had killed the fowls. But he hadn't.

However, there was no more disturbance without, and after a time the sermon closed. There was some sort of a special collection to be taken up. Of course, Uncle Bentley always insisted on taking up all the collections. He hopped up on this occasion and seized the plate with more than usual vigor. His struggles with the roosters had evidently stimulated him. He soon made the rounds and approached the table in front of the pulpit to deposit his harvest. As he did so we saw to our horror that the long tails of that ridiculous coat were violently

agitated. A sickening suspicion came over us. The next moment one of those belligerent young roosters thrust a head out of either of those coat-tail pockets. One uttered a raucous crow, the other made a vicious dab. Uncle Bentley dropped the plate with a scattering of coin, seized a coat skirt in each hand, and drew it front. This dumped both fowls out on the floor, where they went at it hammer and tongs. What happened after this is a blur in most of our memories. All that is certain is that there was an uproar in the congregation, especially the younger portion; that the Deacon began making unsuccessful dives for his poultry; that the organist struck up "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and that the minister waved us away without a benediction amid loud shouts of, "Shoo!" "I swanny!" and, "Drat the pesky critters!" from your Uncle Bentley.

Did it serve to subdue Uncle Bentley? Not in the least; he survived to do worse things.

When it became generally known in Townsend Centre that the Townsends were going to move to the city, there was great excitement and dismay. For the Townsends to move was about equivalent to the town's moving. The Townsend ancestors had founded the village a hundred years ago. The first Townsend had kept a wayside hostelry for man and beast, known as the "Sign of the Leopard." The sign-board, on which the leopard was painted a bright blue, was still extant, and prominently so, being nailed over the present Townsend's front door. This Townsend, by name David, kept the village store. There had been no tavern since the railroad was built through Townsend Centre in his father's day. Therefore the family, being ousted by the march of progress from their chosen employment, took up with a general country store as being the next thing to a country tavern, the principal difference consisting in the fact that all the guests were transients, never requiring bedchambers, securing their rest on the tops of sugar and flour barrels and codfish boxes, and their refreshment from stray nibblings at the stock in trade, to the profitless depletion of raisins and loaf sugar and crackers and cheese.

The flitting of the Townsends from the home of their ancestors was due to a sudden access of wealth from the death of a relative and the desire of Mrs. Townsend to secure better advantages for her son George, sixteen years old, in the way of education, and for her daughter Adrianna, ten years older, better matrimonial opportunities. However, this last inducement for leaving Townsend Centre was not openly stated, only ingeniously surmised by the neighbours.

"Sarah Townsend don't think there's anybody in Townsend Centre fit for her Adrianna to marry, and so she's goin' to take her to Boston to see if she can't pick up somebody there," they said. Then they wondered what Abel Lyons would do. He had been a humble suitor for Adrianna for years, but her mother had not approved, and Adrianna, who was dutiful, had repulsed him delicately and rather sadly. He was the only lover whom she had ever had, and she felt sorry and grateful; she was a plain, awkward girl, and had a patient recognition of the fact.

But her mother was ambitious, more so than her father, who was rather pugnaciously satisfied with what he had, and not easily disposed to change. However, he yielded to his wife and consented to sell out his business and purchase a house in Boston and move there.

David Townsend was curiously unlike the line of ancestors from whom he had come. He had either retrograded or advanced, as one might look at it. His moral character was certainly better, but he had not the fiery spirit and eager grasp at advantage which had distinguished them. Indeed, the old Townsends, though prominent and respected as men of property and influence, had reputations not above suspicions. There was more than one dark whisper regarding them handed down from mother to son in the village, and especially was this true of the first Townsend, he who built the tavern bearing the Sign of the Blue Leopard. His portrait, a hideous effort of contemporary art, hung in the garret of David Townsend's home. There was many a tale of wild roistering, if no worse, in that old roadhouse, and high stakes, and quarreling in cups, and blows, and money gotten in evil fashion, and the matter hushed up with a high hand for inquirers by the imperious Townsends who terrorized everybody. David Townsend terrorized nobody. He had gotten his little competence from his store by honest methods--the exchanging of sterling goods and true weights for country produce and country shillings. He was sober and reliable, with intense self-respect and a decided talent for the management of money. It was principally for this reason that he took great delight in his sudden wealth by legacy. He had thereby greater opportunities for the exercise of his native shrewdness in a bargain. This he evinced in his purchase of a house in Boston.

One day in spring the old Townsend house was shut up, the Blue Leopard was taken carefully down from his lair over the front door, the family chattels were loaded on the train, and the Townsends departed. It was a sad and eventful day for Townsend Centre. A man from Barre had rented the store--David had decided at the last not to sell--and the old familiars congregated in melancholy fashion and talked over the situation. An enormous pride over their departed townsman became evident. They paraded him, flaunting him like a banner in the eyes of

the new man. "David is awful smart," they said; "there won't nobody get the better of him in the city if he has lived in Townsend Centre all his life. He's got his eyes open. Know what he paid for his house in Boston? Well, sir, that house cost twenty-five thousand dollars, and David he bought it for five. Yes, sir, he did."

"Must have been some out about it," remarked the new man, scowling over his counter. He was beginning to feel his disparaging situation.

"Not an out, sir. David he made sure on't. Catch him gettin' bit. Everythin' was in apple-pie order, hot an' cold water and all, and in one of the best locations of the city--real high-up street. David he said the rent in that street was never under a thousand. Yes, sir, David he got a bargain--five thousand dollars for a twenty-five-thousand-dollar house."

"Some out about it!" growled the new man over the counter.

However, as his fellow townsmen and allies stated, there seemed to be no doubt about the desirableness of the city house which David Townsend had purchased and the fact that he had secured it for an absurdly low price. The whole family were at first suspicious. It was ascertained that the house had cost a round sum only a few years ago; it was in perfect repair; nothing whatever was amiss with plumbing, furnace, anything. There was not even a soap factory within smelling distance, as Mrs. Townsend had vaguely surmised. She was sure that she had heard of houses being undesirable for such reasons, but there was no soap factory. They all sniffed and peeked; when the first rainfall came they looked at the ceiling, confidently expecting to see dark spots where the leaks had commenced, but there were none. They were forced to confess that their suspicions were allayed, that the house was perfect, even overshadowed with the mystery of a lower price than it was worth. That, however, was an additional perfection in the opinion of the Townsends, who had their share of New England thrift. They had lived just one month in their new house, and were happy, although at times somewhat lonely from missing the society of Townsend Centre, when the trouble began. The Townsends, although they lived in a fine house in a genteel, almost fashionable, part of the city, were true to their

antecedents and kept, as they had been accustomed, only one maid. She was the daughter of a farmer on the outskirts of their native village, was middle-aged, and had lived with them for the last ten years. One pleasant Monday morning she rose early and did the family washing before breakfast, which had been prepared by Mrs. Townsend and Adrianna, as was their habit on washing-days. The family were seated at the breakfast table in their basement dining-room, and this maid, whose name was Cordelia, was hanging out the clothes in the vacant lot. This vacant lot seemed a valuable one, being on a corner. It was rather singular that it had not been built upon. The Townsends had wondered at it and agreed that they would have preferred their own house to be there. They had, however, utilized it as far as possible with their innocent, rural disregard of property rights in unoccupied land.

"We might just as well hang out our washing in that vacant lot," Mrs. Townsend had told Cordelia the first Monday of their stay in the house. "Our little yard ain't half big enough for all our clothes, and it is sunnier there, too."

So Cordelia had hung out the wash there for four Mondays, and this was the fifth. The breakfast was about half finished--they had reached the buckwheat cakes--when this maid came rushing into the dining-room and stood regarding them, speechless, with a countenance indicative of the utmost horror. She was deadly pale. Her hands, sodden with soapsuds, hung twitching at her sides in the folds of her calico gown; her very hair, which was light and sparse, seemed to bristle with fear. All the Townsends turned and looked at her. David and George rose with a half-defined idea of burglars.

"Cordelia Battles, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Townsend. Adrianna gasped for breath and turned as white as the maid. "What is the matter?" repeated Mrs. Townsend, but the maid was unable to speak. Mrs. Townsend, who could be peremptory, sprang up, ran to the frightened woman and shook her violently. "Cordelia Battles, you speak," said she, "and not stand there staring that way, as if you were struck dumb! What is the matter with you?"

Then Cordelia spoke in a fainting voice.

"There's--somebody else--hanging out clothes--in the vacant lot," she gasped, and clutched at a chair for support.

"Who?" cried Mrs. Townsend, rousing to indignation, for already she had assumed a proprietorship in the vacant lot. "Is it the folks in the next house? I'd like to know what right they have! We are next to that vacant lot."

"I--dunno--who it is," gasped Cordelia. "Why, we've seen that girl next door go to mass every morning," said Mrs. Townsend. "She's got a fiery red head. Seems as if you might know her by this time, Cordelia."

"It ain't that girl," gasped Cordelia. Then she added in a horror-stricken voice, "I couldn't see who 'twas."

They all stared.

"Why couldn't you see?" demanded her mistress. "Are you struck blind?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then why couldn't you see?"

"All I could see was--" Cordelia hesitated, with an expression of the utmost horror.

"Go on," said Mrs. Townsend, impatiently.

"All I could see was the shadow of somebody, very slim, hanging out the clothes, and--"

"What?"

"I could see the shadows of the things flappin' on their line."

"You couldn't see the clothes?"

"Only the shadow on the ground."

"What kind of clothes were they?"

"Queer," replied Cordelia, with a shudder.

"If I didn't know you so well, I should think you had been drinking," said Mrs. Townsend. "Now, Cordelia Battles, I'm going out in that vacant lot and see myself what you're talking about."

"I can't go," gasped the woman.

With that Mrs. Townsend and all the others, except Adrianna, who remained to tremble with the maid, sallied forth into the vacant lot. They had to go out the area gate into the street to reach it. It was nothing unusual in the way of vacant lots. One large poplar tree, the relic of the old forest which had once flourished there, twinkled in one corner; for the rest, it was overgrown with coarse weeds and a few dusty flowers. The Townsends stood just inside the rude board fence which divided the lot from the street and stared with wonder and horror, for Cordelia had told the truth. They all saw what she had described--the shadow of an exceedingly slim woman moving along the ground with up-stretched arms, the shadows of strange, nondescript garments flapping from a shadowy line, but when they looked up for the substance of the shadows nothing was to be seen except the clear, blue October air.

"My goodness!" gasped Mrs. Townsend. Her face assumed a strange gathering of wrath in the midst of her terror. Suddenly she made a determined move forward, although her husband strove to hold her back.

"You let me be," said she. She moved forward. Then she recoiled and gave a loud shriek. "The wet sheet flapped in my face," she cried. "Take me away, take me away!" Then she fainted. Between them they got her back to the house. "It was awful," she moaned when she came to herself, with the family all around her where she lay on the dining-room floor. "Oh, David, what do you suppose it is?"

"Nothing at all," replied David Townsend stoutly. He was remarkable for courage and staunch belief in actualities. He was now denying to himself that he had seen anything unusual.

"Oh, there was," moaned his wife.

"I saw something," said George, in a sullen, boyish bass.

The maid sobbed convulsively and so did Adrianna for sympathy.

"We won't talk any about it," said David. "Here, Jane, you drink this hot tea--it will do you good; and Cordelia, you hang out the clothes in our own yard. George, you go and put up the line for her."

"The line is out there," said George, with a jerk of his shoulder.

"Are you afraid?"

"No, I ain't," replied the boy resentfully, and went out with a pale face.

After that Cordelia hung the Townsend wash in the yard of their own house, standing always with her back to the vacant lot. As for David Townsend, he spent a good deal of his time in the lot watching the shadows, but he came to no explanation, although he strove to satisfy himself with many.

"I guess the shadows come from the smoke from our chimneys, or else the poplar tree," he said.

"Why do the shadows come on Monday mornings, and no other?" demanded his wife.

David was silent.

Very soon new mysteries arose. One day Cordelia rang the dinner-bell at their usual dinner hour, the same as in Townsend Centre, high noon,

and the family assembled. With amazement Adrianna looked at the dishes on the table.

"Why, that's queer!" she said.

"What's queer?" asked her mother.

Cordelia stopped short as she was about setting a tumbler of water beside a plate, and the water slopped over.

"Why," said Adrianna, her face paling, "I--thought there was boiled dinner. I--smelt cabbage cooking."

"I knew there would something else come up," gasped Cordelia, leaning hard on the back of Adrianna's chair.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Townsend sharply, but her own face began to assume the shocked pallour which it was so easy nowadays for all their faces to assume at the merest suggestion of anything out of the common.

"I smelt cabbage cooking all the morning up in my room," Adrianna said faintly, "and here's codfish and potatoes for dinner."

The Townsends all looked at one another. David rose with an exclamation and rushed out of the room. The others waited tremblingly. When he came back his face was lowering.

"What did you--" Mrs. Townsend asked hesitatingly.

"There's some smell of cabbage out there," he admitted reluctantly. Then he looked at her with a challenge. "It comes from the next house," he said. "Blows over our house."

"Our house is higher."

"I don't care; you can never account for such things."

"Cordelia," said Mrs. Townsend, "you go over to the next house and you ask if they've got cabbage for dinner."

Cordelia switched out of the room, her mouth set hard. She came back promptly.

"Says they never have cabbage," she announced with gloomy triumph and a conclusive glance at Mr. Townsend. "Their girl was real sassy."

"Oh, father, let's move away; let's sell the house," cried Adrianna in a panic-stricken tone.

"If you think I'm going to sell a house that I got as cheap as this one because we smell cabbage in a vacant lot, you're mistaken," replied David firmly.

"It isn't the cabbage alone," said Mrs. Townsend.

"And a few shadows," added David. "I am tired of such nonsense. I thought you had more sense, Jane."

"One of the boys at school asked me if we lived in the house next to the vacant lot on Wells Street and whistled when I said 'Yes,'" remarked George.

"Let him whistle," said Mr. Townsend.

After a few hours the family, stimulated by Mr. Townsend's calm, common sense, agreed that it was exceedingly foolish to be disturbed by a mysterious odour of cabbage. They even laughed at themselves.

"I suppose we have got so nervous over those shadows hanging out clothes that we notice every little thing," conceded Mrs. Townsend.

"You will find out some day that that is no more to be regarded than the cabbage," said her husband.

"You can't account for that wet sheet hitting my face," said Mrs.

Townsend, doubtfully.

"You imagined it."

"I FELT it."

That afternoon things went on as usual in the household until nearly four o'clock. Adrianna went downtown to do some shopping. Mrs. Townsend sat sewing beside the bay window in her room, which was a front one in the third story. George had not got home. Mr. Townsend was writing a letter in the library. Cordelia was busy in the basement; the twilight, which was coming earlier and earlier every night, was beginning to gather, when suddenly there was a loud crash which shook the house from its foundations. Even the dishes on the sideboard rattled, and the glasses rang like bells. The pictures on the walls of Mrs. Townsend's room swung out from the walls. But that was not all: every looking-glass in the house cracked simultaneously--as nearly as they could judge--from top to bottom, then shattered into fragments over the floors. Mrs. Townsend was too frightened to scream. She sat huddled in her chair, gasping for breath, her eyes, rolling from side to side in incredulous terror, turned toward the street. She saw a great black group of people crossing it just in front of the vacant lot. There was something inexpressibly strange and gloomy about this moving group; there was an effect of sweeping, wavings and foldings of sable draperies and gleams of deadly white faces; then they passed. She twisted her head to see, and they disappeared in the vacant lot. Mr. Townsend came hurrying into the room; he was pale, and looked at once angry and alarmed.

"Did you fall?" he asked inconsequently, as if his wife, who was small, could have produced such a manifestation by a fall.

"Oh, David, what is it?" whispered Mrs. Townsend.

"Darned if I know!" said David.

"Don't swear. It's too awful. Oh, see the looking-glass, David!"

"I see it. The one over the library mantel is broken, too."

"Oh, it is a sign of death!"

Cordelia's feet were heard as she staggered on the stairs. She almost fell into the room. She reeled over to Mr. Townsend and clutched his arm. He cast a sidewise glance, half furious, half commiserating at her.

"Well, what is it all about?" he asked.

"I don't know. What is it? Oh, what is it? The looking-glass in the kitchen is broken. All over the floor. Oh, oh! What is it?"

"I don't know any more than you do. I didn't do it."

"Lookin'-glasses broken is a sign of death in the house," said Cordelia. "If it's me, I hope I'm ready; but I'd rather die than be so scared as I've been lately."

Mr. Townsend shook himself loose and eyed the two trembling women with gathering resolution.

"Now, look here, both of you," he said. "This is nonsense. You'll die sure enough of fright if you keep on this way. I was a fool myself to be startled. Everything it is is an earthquake."

"Oh, David!" gasped his wife, not much reassured.

"It is nothing but an earthquake," persisted Mr. Townsend. "It acted just like that. Things always are broken on the walls, and the middle of the room isn't affected. I've read about it."

Suddenly Mrs. Townsend gave a loud shriek and pointed.

"How do you account for that," she cried, "if it's an earthquake? Oh, oh, oh!"

She was on the verge of hysterics. Her husband held her firmly by the arm as his eyes followed the direction of her rigid pointing finger. Cordelia looked also, her eyes seeming converged to a bright point of fear. On the floor in front of the broken looking-glass lay a mass of black stuff in a grewsome long ridge.

"It's something you dropped there," almost shouted Mr. Townsend.

"It ain't. Oh!"

Mr. Townsend dropped his wife's arm and took one stride toward the object. It was a very long crape veil. He lifted it, and it floated out from his arm as if imbued with electricity.

"It's yours," he said to his wife.

"Oh, David, I never had one. You know, oh, you know I--shouldn't--unless you died. How came it there?"

"I'm darned if I know," said David, regarding it. He was deadly pale, but still resentful rather than afraid.

"Don't hold it; don't!"

"I'd like to know what in thunder all this means?" said David. He gave the thing an angry toss and it fell on the floor in exactly the same long heap as before.

Cordelia began to weep with racking sobs. Mrs. Townsend reached out and caught her husband's hand, clutching it hard with ice-cold fingers.

"What's got into this house, anyhow?" he growled.

"You'll have to sell it. Oh, David, we can't live here."

"As for my selling a house I paid only five thousand for when it's worth twenty-five, for any such nonsense as this, I won't!"

David gave one stride toward the black veil, but it rose from the floor and moved away before him across the room at exactly the same height as if suspended from a woman's head. He pursued it, clutching vainly, all around the room, then he swung himself on his heel with an exclamation and the thing fell to the floor again in the long heap. Then were heard hurrying feet on the stairs and Adrianna burst into the room. She ran straight to her father and clutched his arm; she tried to speak, but she chattered unintelligibly; her face was blue. Her father shook her violently.

"Adrianna, do have more sense!" he cried.

"Oh, David, how can you talk so?" sobbed her mother.

"I can't help it. I'm mad!" said he with emphasis. "What has got into this house and you all, anyhow?"

"What is it, Adrianna, poor child," asked her mother. "Only look what has happened here."

"It's an earthquake," said her father staunchly; "nothing to be afraid of."

"How do you account for THAT?" said Mrs. Townsend in an awful voice, pointing to the veil.

Adrianna did not look--she was too engrossed with her own terrors. She began to speak in a breathless voice.

"I--was--coming--by the vacant lot," she panted, "and--I--had my new hat in a paper bag and--a parcel of blue ribbon, and--I saw a crowd, an awful--oh! a whole crowd of people with white faces, as if--they were dressed all in black."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know. Oh!" Adrianna sank gasping feebly into a chair.

"Get her some water, David," sobbed her mother.

David rushed with an impatient exclamation out of the room and returned with a glass of water which he held to his daughter's lips.

"Here, drink this!" he said roughly.

"Oh, David, how can you speak so?" sobbed his wife.

"I can't help it. I'm mad clean through," said David.

Then there was a hard bound upstairs, and George entered. He was very white, but he grinned at them with an appearance of unconcern.

"Hullo!" he said in a shaking voice, which he tried to control. "What on earth's to pay in that vacant lot now?"

"Well, what is it?" demanded his father.

"Oh, nothing, only--well, there are lights over it exactly as if there was a house there, just about where the windows would be. It looked as if you could walk right in, but when you look close there are those old dried-up weeds rattling away on the ground the same as ever. I looked at it and couldn't believe my eyes. A woman saw it, too. She came along just as I did. She gave one look, then she screeched and ran. I waited for some one else, but nobody came."

Mr. Townsend rushed out of the room.

"I daresay it'll be gone when he gets there," began George, then he stared round the room. "What's to pay here?" he cried.

"Oh, George, the whole house shook all at once, and all the looking-glasses broke," wailed his mother, and Adrianna and Cordelia joined.

George whistled with pale lips. Then Mr. Townsend entered.

"Well," asked George, "see anything?"

"I don't want to talk," said his father. "I've stood just about enough."

"We've got to sell out and go back to Townsend Centre," cried his wife in a wild voice. "Oh, David, say you'll go back."

"I won't go back for any such nonsense as this, and sell a twenty-five thousand dollar house for five thousand," said he firmly.

But that very night his resolution was shaken. The whole family watched together in the dining-room. They were all afraid to go to bed—that is, all except possibly Mr. Townsend. Mrs. Townsend declared firmly that she for one would leave that awful house and go back to Townsend Centre whether he came or not, unless they all stayed together and watched, and Mr. Townsend yielded. They chose the dining-room for the reason that it was nearer the street should they wish to make their egress hurriedly, and they took up their station around the dining-table on which Cordelia had placed a luncheon.

"It looks exactly as if we were watching with a corpse," she said in a horror-stricken whisper.

"Hold your tongue if you can't talk sense," said Mr. Townsend.

The dining-room was very large, finished in oak, with a dark blue paper above the wainscotting. The old sign of the tavern, the Blue Leopard, hung over the mantel-shelf. Mr. Townsend had insisted on hanging it there. He had a curious pride in it. The family sat together until after midnight and nothing unusual happened. Mrs. Townsend began to nod; Mr. Townsend read the paper ostentatiously. Adrianna and Cordelia stared with roving eyes about the room, then at each other as if comparing notes on terror. George had a book which he studied furtively. All at once Adrianna gave a startled exclamation and Cordelia echoed her. George whistled faintly. Mrs. Townsend awoke with a start and Mr. Townsend's paper rattled to the floor.

"Look!" gasped Adrianna.

The sign of the Blue Leopard over the shelf glowed as if a lantern hung over it. The radiance was thrown from above. It grew brighter and brighter as they watched. The Blue Leopard seemed to crouch and spring with life. Then the door into the front hall opened--the outer door, which had been carefully locked. It squeaked and they all recognized it. They sat staring. Mr. Townsend was as transfixed as the rest. They heard the outer door shut, then the door into the room swung open and slowly that awful black group of people which they had seen in the afternoon entered. The Townsends with one accord rose and huddled together in a far corner; they all held to each other and stared. The people, their faces gleaming with a whiteness of death, their black robes waving and folding, crossed the room. They were a trifle above mortal height, or seemed so to the terrified eyes which saw them. They reached the mantel-shelf where the sign-board hung, then a black-draped long arm was seen to rise and make a motion, as if plying a knocker. Then the whole company passed out of sight, as if through the wall, and the room was as before. Mrs. Townsend was shaking in a nervous chill, Adrianna was almost fainting, Cordelia was in hysterics. David Townsend stood glaring in a curious way at the sign of the Blue Leopard. George stared at him with a look of horror. There was something in his father's face which made him forget everything else. At last he touched his arm timidly.

"Father," he whispered.

David turned and regarded him with a look of rage and fury, then his face cleared; he passed his hand over his forehead.

"Good Lord! What DID come to me?" he muttered.

"You looked like that awful picture of old Tom Townsend in the garret in Townsend Centre, father," whimpered the boy, shuddering.

"Should think I might look like 'most any old cuss after such darned work as this," growled David, but his face was white. "Go and pour out some hot tea for your mother," he ordered the boy sharply. He himself

shook Cordelia violently. "Stop such actions!" he shouted in her ears, and shook her again. "Ain't you a church member?" he demanded; "what be you afraid of? You ain't done nothin' wrong, have ye?"

Then Cordelia quoted Scripture in a burst of sobs and laughter.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me," she cried out. "If I ain't done wrong, mebbe them that's come before me did, and when the Evil One and the Powers of Darkness is abroad I'm liable, I'm liable!" Then she laughed loud and long and shrill.

"If you don't hush up," said David, but still with that white terror and horror on his own face, "I'll bundle you out in that vacant lot whether or no. I mean it."

Then Cordelia was quiet, after one wild roll of her eyes at him. The colour was returning to Adrianna's cheeks; her mother was drinking hot tea in spasmodic gulps.

"It's after midnight," she gasped, "and I don't believe they'll come again to-night. Do you, David?"

"No, I don't," said David conclusively.

"Oh, David, we mustn't stay another night in this awful house."

"We won't. To-morrow we'll pack off bag and baggage to Townsend Centre, if it takes all the fire department to move us," said David.

Adrianna smiled in the midst of her terror. She thought of Abel Lyons.

The next day Mr. Townsend went to the real estate agent who had sold him the house.

"It's no use," he said, "I can't stand it. Sell the house for what you can get. I'll give it away rather than keep it."

Then he added a few strong words as to his opinion of parties who sold him such an establishment. But the agent pleaded innocent for the most part.

"I'll own I suspected something wrong when the owner, who pledged me to secrecy as to his name, told me to sell that place for what I could get, and did not limit me. I had never heard anything, but I began to suspect something was wrong. Then I made a few inquiries and found out that there was a rumour in the neighbourhood that there was something out of the usual about that vacant lot. I had wondered myself why it wasn't built upon. There was a story about it's being undertaken once, and the contract made, and the contractor dying; then another man took it and one of the workmen was killed on his way to dig the cellar, and the others struck. I didn't pay much attention to it. I never believed much in that sort of thing anyhow, and then, too, I couldn't find out that there had ever been anything wrong about the house itself, except as the people who had lived there were said to have seen and heard queer things in the vacant lot, so I thought you might be able to get along, especially as you didn't look like a man who was timid, and the house was such a bargain as I never handled before. But this you tell me is beyond belief."

"Do you know the names of the people who formerly owned the vacant lot?" asked Mr. Townsend.

"I don't know for certain," replied the agent, "for the original owners flourished long before your or my day, but I do know that the lot goes by the name of the old Gaston lot. What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No; it is nothing," replied Mr. Townsend. "Get what you can for the house; perhaps another family might not be as troubled as we have been."

"I hope you are not going to leave the city?" said the agent, urbanely.

"I am going back to Townsend Centre as fast as steam can carry me after we get packed up and out of that cursed house," replied Mr. David Townsend.

He did not tell the agent nor any of his family what had caused him to start when told the name of the former owners of the lot. He remembered all at once the story of a ghastly murder which had taken place in the Blue Leopard. The victim's name was Gaston and the murderer had never been discovered.

"WHAT IS TRUTH?" by Maurice Baring
from Orpheus in Mayfair and Other Stories and Sketches, EBook #2492

To E. I. Huber

Sitting opposite me in the second-class carriage of the express train which was crawling at a leisurely pace from Moscow to the south was a little girl who looked as if she were about twelve years old, with her mother. The mother was a large fair-haired person, with a good-natured expression. They had a dog with them, and the little girl, whose whole face twitched every now and then from St. Vitus' dance, got out at nearly every station to buy food for the dog. On the same side of the carriage, in the opposite corner, another lady (thin, fair, and wearing a pince-nez) was reading the newspaper. She and the mother of the child soon made friends over the dog. That is to say, the dog made friends with the strange lady and was reproved by its mistress, and the strange lady said: "Please don't scold him. He is not in the least in my way, and I like dogs." They then began to talk.

The large lady was going to the country. She and her daughter had been ordered to go there by the doctor. She had spent six weeks in Moscow under medical treatment, and they had now been told to finish this cure with a thorough rest in the country air. The thin lady asked her the name of her doctor, and before ascertaining what was the disease in question, recommended another doctor who had cured a friend of hers, almost as though by miracle, of heart disease. The large lady seemed interested and wrote down the direction of the marvellous physician. She was herself suffering, she said, from a nervous illness, and her daughter had St. Vitus' dance. They were so far quite satisfied with their doctor. They talked for some time exclusively about medical matters, comparing notes about doctors, diseases, and remedies. The thin lady said she had been cured of all her ills by aspirin and cinnamon.

In the course of the conversation the stout lady mentioned her husband, who, it turned out, was the head of the gendarmerie in a town in Siberia, not far from Irkutsk. This seemed to interest the thin lady immensely. She at once asked what were his political views, and what she herself thought about politics.

The large lady seemed to be reluctant to talk politics and evaded the questions for some time, but after much desultory conversation, which always came back to the same point, she said:--

"My husband is a Conservative; they call him a 'Black Hundred,' but it's most unfair and untrue, because he is a very good man and very just. He has his own opinions and he is sincere. He does not believe in the revolution or in the revolutionaries. He took the oath to serve the Emperor when everything went quietly and well, and now, although I have often begged him to leave the Service, he says it would be very wrong to leave just because it is dangerous. 'I have taken the oath,' he says, 'and I must keep it.'"

Here she stopped, but after some further questions on the part of the thin lady, she said: "I never had time or leisure to think of these questions. I was married when I was sixteen. I have had eight children, and they all died one after the other except this one, who was the eldest. I used to see political exiles and prisoners, and I used to feel sympathy for them. I used to hear about people being sent here and there, and sometimes I used to go down on my knees to my husband to do what he could for them, but I never thought about there being any particular idea at the back of all this." Then after a short pause she added: "It first dawned on me at Moscow. It was after the big strike, and I was on my way home. I had been staying with some friends in the country, and I happened by chance to see the funeral of that man Bauman, the doctor, who was killed. I was very much impressed when I saw that huge procession go past, all the men singing the funeral march, and I understood that Bauman himself had nothing to do with it. Who cared about Bauman? But I understood that he was a symbol. I saw that there must be a big idea which moves all these people to give up everything, to go to prison, to kill, and be killed. I understood this for the first time at that funeral. I cried when the crowd went past. I understood there was a big idea, a great cause behind it all. Then I went home.

"There were disorders in Siberia: you know in Siberia we are much freer than you are. There is only one society. The officials, the political people, revolutionaries, exiles, everybody, in fact, all meet

constantly. I used to go to political meetings, and to see and talk with the Liberal and revolutionary leaders. Then I began to be disappointed because what had always struck me as unjust was that one man, just because he happened to be, say, Ivan Pavlovitch, should be able to rule over another man who happened to be, say, Ivan Ivanovitch. And now that these Republics were being made, it seemed that the same thing was beginning all over again--that all the places of authority were being seized and dealt out amongst another lot of people who were behaving exactly like those who had authority before. The arbitrary authority was there just the same, only it had changed hands, and this puzzled me very much, and I began to ask myself, "Where is the truth?"

"What did your husband think?" asked the thin lady.

"My husband did not like to talk about these things," she answered. "He says, 'I am in the Service, and I have to serve. It is not my business to have opinions.'"

"But all those Republics didn't last very long," rejoined the thin lady.

"No," continued the other; "we never had a Republic, and after a time they arrested the chief agitator, who was the soul of the revolutionary movement in our town, a wonderful orator. I had heard him speak several times and been carried away. When he was arrested I saw him taken to prison, and he said 'Good-bye' to the people, and bowed to them in the street in such an exaggerated theatrical way that I was astonished and felt uncomfortable. Here, I thought, is a man who can sacrifice himself for an idea, and who seemed to be thoroughly sincere, and yet he behaves theatrically and poses as if he were not sincere. I felt more puzzled than ever, and I asked my husband to let me go and see him in prison. I thought that perhaps after talking to him I could solve the riddle, and find out once for all who was right and who was wrong. My husband let me go, and I was admitted into his cell.

"'You know who I am,' I said, 'since I am here, and I am admitted inside these locked doors?' He nodded. Then I asked him whether I could be of any use to him. He said that he had all that he wanted; and like this the ice was broken, and I asked him presently if he believed in

the whole movement. He said that until the 17th of October, when the Manifesto had been issued, he had believed with all his soul in it; but the events of the last months had caused him to change his mind. He now thought that the work of his party, and, in fact, the whole movement, which had been going on for over fifty years, had really been in vain. 'We shall have,' he said, 'to begin again from the very beginning, because the Russian people are not ready for us yet, and probably another fifty years will have to go by before they are ready.'

"I left him very much perplexed. He was set free not long afterwards, in virtue of some manifesto, and because there had been no disorders in our town and he had not been the cause of any bloodshed. Soon after he came out of prison my husband met him, and he said to my husband: 'I suppose you will not shake hands with me?' And my husband replied: 'Because our views are different there is no reason why both of us should not be honest men,' and he shook hands with him."

The conversation now became a discussion about the various ideals of various people and parties holding different political views. The large lady kept on expressing the puzzled state of mind in which she was.

The whole conversation, of which I have given a very condensed report, was spread over a long time, and often interrupted. Later they reached the subject of political assassination, and the large lady said:--

"About two months after I came home that year, one day when I was out driving with my daughter in a sledge the revolutionaries fired six shots at us from revolvers. We were not hit, but one bullet went through the coachman's cap. Ever since then I have had nervous fits and my daughter has had St. Vitus' dance. We have to go to Moscow every year to be treated. And it is so difficult. I don't know how to manage. When I am at home I feel as if I ought to go, and when I am away I never have a moment's peace, because I cannot help thinking the whole time that my husband is in danger. A few weeks after they shot at us I met some of the revolutionary party at a meeting, and I asked them why they had shot at myself and my daughter. I could have understood it if they had shot at my husband. But why at us? He said: 'When the wood is cut down, the chips fly about.'[*] And now I don't know what to think about it all.

[*] A Russian proverb.

"Sometimes I think it is all a mistake, and I feel that the revolutionaries are posing and playing a part, and that so soon as they get the upper hand they will be as bad as what we have now; and then I say to myself, all the same they are acting in a cause, and it is a great cause, and they are working for liberty and for the people. And, then, would the people be better off if they had their way? The more I think of it the more puzzled I am. Who is right? Is my husband right? Are they right? Is it a great cause? How can they be wrong if they are imprisoned and killed for what they believe? Where is the truth, and what is truth?"

AS it is well known that the 'wise men' came 'from the East,' and as Mr. Touch-and-go Bullet-head came from the East, it follows that Mr. Bullet-head was a wise man; and if collateral proof of the matter be needed, here we have it--Mr. B. was an editor. Irascibility was his sole foible, for in fact the obstinacy of which men accused him was anything but his foible, since he justly considered it his forte. It was his strong point--his virtue; and it would have required all the logic of a Brownson to convince him that it was 'anything else.'

I have shown that Touch-and-go Bullet-head was a wise man; and the only occasion on which he did not prove infallible, was when, abandoning that legitimate home for all wise men, the East, he migrated to the city of Alexander-the-Great-o-nopolis, or some place of a similar title, out West.

I must do him the justice to say, however, that when he made up his mind finally to settle in that town, it was under the impression that no newspaper, and consequently no editor, existed in that particular section of the country. In establishing 'The Tea-Pot' he expected to have the field all to himself. I feel confident he never would have dreamed of taking up his residence in Alexander-the-Great-o-nopolis had he been aware that, in Alexander-the-Great-o-nopolis, there lived a gentleman named John Smith (if I rightly remember), who for many years had there quietly grown fat in editing and publishing the 'Alexander-the-Great-o-nopolis Gazette.' It was solely, therefore, on account of having been misinformed, that Mr. Bullet-head found himself in Alex--suppose we call it Nopolis, 'for short'--but, as he did find himself there, he determined to keep up his character for obst--for firmness, and remain. So remain he did; and he did more; he unpacked his press, type, etc., etc., rented an office exactly opposite to that of the 'Gazette,' and, on the third morning after his arrival, issued the first number of 'The Alexan'--that is to say, of 'The Nopolis Tea-Pot'--as nearly as I can recollect, this was the name of the new paper.

The leading article, I must admit, was brilliant--not to say severe. It was especially bitter about things in general--and as for the editor of 'The Gazette,' he was torn all to pieces in particular. Some of Bullethead's remarks were really so fiery that I have always, since that time, been forced to look upon John Smith, who is still alive, in the light of a salamander. I cannot pretend to give all the 'Tea-Pot's' paragraphs verbatim, but one of them runs thus:

'Oh, yes!--Oh, we perceive! Oh, no doubt! The editor over the way is a genius--O, my! Oh, goodness, gracious!--what is this world coming to? Oh, tempora! Oh, Moses!'

A philippic at once so caustic and so classical, alighted like a bombshell among the hitherto peaceful citizens of Nopolis. Groups of excited individuals gathered at the corners of the streets. Every one awaited, with heartfelt anxiety, the reply of the dignified Smith. Next morning it appeared as follows:

'We quote from "The Tea-Pot" of yesterday the subjoined paragraph: "Oh, yes! Oh, we perceive! Oh, no doubt! Oh, my! Oh, goodness! Oh, tempora! Oh, Moses!" Why, the fellow is all O! That accounts for his reasoning in a circle, and explains why there is neither beginning nor end to him, nor to anything he says. We really do not believe the vagabond can write a word that hasn't an O in it. Wonder if this O-ing is a habit of his? By-the-by, he came away from Down-East in a great hurry. Wonder if he O's as much there as he does here? "O! it is pitiful."'

The indignation of Mr. Bullet-head at these scandalous insinuations, I shall not attempt to describe. On the eel-skinning principle, however, he did not seem to be so much incensed at the attack upon his integrity as one might have imagined. It was the sneer at his style that drove him to desperation. What!--he Touch-and-go Bullet-head!--not able to write a word without an O in it! He would soon let the jackanapes see that he was mistaken. Yes! he would let him see how much he was mistaken, the puppy! He, Touch-and-go Bullet-head, of Frogpondium, would let Mr. John Smith perceive that he, Bullet-head, could indite, if it so pleased him, a whole paragraph--aye! a whole article--in which that contemptible vowel should not once--not even once--make its appearance. But no;--that

would be yielding a point to the said John Smith. He, Bullet-head, would make no alteration in his style, to suit the caprices of any Mr. Smith in Christendom. Perish so vile a thought! The O forever; He would persist in the O. He would be as O-wy as O-wy could be.

Burning with the chivalry of this determination, the great Touch-and-go, in the next 'Tea-Pot,' came out merely with this simple but resolute paragraph, in reference to this unhappy affair:

"The editor of the "Tea-Pot" has the honor of advising the editor of the "Gazette" that he (the "Tea-Pot") will take an opportunity in tomorrow morning's paper, of convincing him (the "Gazette") that he (the "Tea-Pot") both can and will be his own master, as regards style; he (the "Tea-Pot") intending to show him (the "Gazette") the supreme, and indeed the withering contempt with which the criticism of him (the "Gazette") inspires the independent bosom of him (the "TeaPot") by composing for the especial gratification (?) of him (the "Gazette") a leading article, of some extent, in which the beautiful vowel--the emblem of Eternity--yet so offensive to the hyper-exquisite delicacy of him (the "Gazette") shall most certainly not be avoided by his (the "Gazette's") most obedient, humble servant, the "Tea-Pot." "So much for Buckingham!"

In fulfilment of the awful threat thus darkly intimated rather than decidedly enunciated, the great Bullet-head, turning a deaf ear to all entreaties for 'copy,' and simply requesting his foreman to 'go to the d----!', when he (the foreman) assured him (the 'Tea-Pot!') that it was high time to 'go to press': turning a deaf ear to everything, I say, the great Bullet-head sat up until day-break, consuming the midnight oil, and absorbed in the composition of the really unparalleled paragraph, which follows:--

'So ho, John! how now? Told you so, you know. Don't crow, another time, before you're out of the woods! Does your mother know you're out? Oh, no, no!--so go home at once, now, John, to your odious old woods of Concord! Go home to your woods, old owl--go! You won't! Oh, poh, poh, don't do so! You've got to go, you know! So go at once, and don't go slow, for nobody owns you here, you know! Oh! John, John, if you don't

go you're no homo--no! You're only a fowl, an owl, a cow, a sow,--a doll, a poll; a poor, old, good-for-nothing-to-nobody, log, dog, hog, or frog, come out of a Concord bog. Cool, now--cool! Do be cool, you fool! None of your crowing, old cock! Don't frown so--don't! Don't hollo, nor howl nor growl, nor bow-wow-wow! Good Lord, John, how you do look! Told you so, you know--but stop rolling your goose of an old poll about so, and go and drown your sorrows in a bowl!"

Exhausted, very naturally, by so stupendous an effort, the great Touch-and-go could attend to nothing farther that night. Firmly, composedly, yet with an air of conscious power, he handed his MS. to the devil in waiting, and then, walking leisurely home, retired, with ineffable dignity to bed.

Meantime the devil, to whom the copy was entrusted, ran up stairs to his 'case,' in an unutterable hurry, and forthwith made a commencement at 'setting' the MS. 'up.'

In the first place, of course,--as the opening word was 'So,'--he made a plunge into the capital S hole and came out in triumph with a capital S. Elated by this success, he immediately threw himself upon the little-o box with a blindfold impetuosity--but who shall describe his horror when his fingers came up without the anticipated letter in their clutch? who shall paint his astonishment and rage at perceiving, as he rubbed his knuckles, that he had been only thumping them to no purpose, against the bottom of an empty box. Not a single little-o was in the little-o hole; and, glancing fearfully at the capital-O partition, he found that to his extreme terror, in a precisely similar predicament. Awe--stricken, his first impulse was to rush to the foreman.

'Sir!' said he, gasping for breath, 'I can't never set up nothing without no o's.'

'What do you mean by that?' growled the foreman, who was in a very ill humor at being kept so late.

'Why, sir, there beant an o in the office, neither a big un nor a little un!"

'What--what the d-l has become of all that were in the case?'

'I don't know, sir,' said the boy, 'but one of them ere "G'zette" devils is bin prowling 'bout here all night, and I spects he's gone and cabbaged 'em every one.'

'Dod rot him! I haven't a doubt of it,' replied the foreman, getting purple with rage 'but I tell you what you do, Bob, that's a good boy--you go over the first chance you get and hook every one of their i's and (d----n them!) their izzards.'

'Jist so,' replied Bob, with a wink and a frown--'I'll be into 'em, I'll let 'em know a thing or two; but in de meantime, that ere paragrab? Mus go in to-night, you know--else there'll be the d-l to pay, and--'

'And not a bit of pitch hot,' interrupted the foreman, with a deep sigh, and an emphasis on the 'bit.' 'Is it a long paragrab, Bob?'

'Shouldn't call it a wery long paragrab,' said Bob.

'Ah, well, then! do the best you can with it! We must get to press,' said the foreman, who was over head and ears in work; 'just stick in some other letter for o; nobody's going to read the fellow's trash anyhow.'

'Wery well,' replied Bob, 'here goes it!' and off he hurried to his case, muttering as he went: 'Considdeble vell, them ere expressions, perticcler for a man as doesn't swar. So I's to gouge out all their eyes, eh? and d-n all their gizzards! Vell! this here's the chap as is just able for to do it.' The fact is that although Bob was but twelve years old and four feet high, he was equal to any amount of fight, in a small way.

The exigency here described is by no means of rare occurrence in printing-offices; and I cannot tell how to account for it, but the fact is indisputable, that when the exigency does occur, it almost always happens that x is adopted as a substitute for the letter deficient. The

true reason, perhaps, is that x is rather the most superabundant letter in the cases, or at least was so in the old times--long enough to render the substitution in question an habitual thing with printers. As for Bob, he would have considered it heretical to employ any other character, in a case of this kind, than the x to which he had been accustomed.

'I shell have to x this ere paragrab,' said he to himself, as he read it over in astonishment, 'but it's jest about the awfulest o-wy paragrab I ever did see': so x it he did, unflinchingly, and to press it went x-ed.

Next morning the population of Nopolis were taken all aback by reading in 'The Tea-Pot,' the following extraordinary leader:

'Sx hx, Jxhn! hwx nxw? Txld yxu sx, yxu knxw. Dxn't crxw, anxther time, bexfre yxu're xut xf the wxxds! Dxes yxur mxther knxw yxu're xut? Xh, nx, nx!--sx gx hxme at xnce, nxw, Jxhn, tx yxur xdixus xld wxxds xf Cxncxrd! Gx hxme tx yxur wxxds, xld xwl,--gx! Yxu wxn't? Xh, pxh, pxh, Jxhn, dxn't dx sx! Yxu've gxt tx gx, yxu knxw, sx gx at xnce, and dxn't gx slxw; fxr nxbxdy xwns yxu here, yxu knxw. Xh, Jxhn, Jxhn, Jxhn, if yxu dxn't gx yxu're nx hxmx--nx! Yxu're xnly a fxwl, an xwl; a cxw, a sxw; a dxll, a pxll; a pxxr xld gxxd-fxr-nxthing-tx-nxbxdy, lxx, dxg, hxg, xr frxg, cxme xut xf a Cxncxrd bxg. Cxxl, nxw--cxxl! Dx be cxxl, yxu fxxl! Nxne xf yxur crxwing, xld cxck! Dxn't frxwn sx--dxn't! Dxn't hxllx, nxr hxwl, nxr grxwl, nxr bxw-wxw-wxw! Gxxd Lxrd, Jxhn, hwx yxu dx lxxk! Txld yxu sx, yxu knxw,--but stxp rxlling yxur gxxse xf an xld pxll abut sx, and gx and drxwn yxur sxrxws in a bxwl!"

The uproar occasioned by this mystical and cabalistical article, is not to be conceived. The first definite idea entertained by the populace was, that some diabolical treason lay concealed in the hieroglyphics; and there was a general rush to Bullet-head's residence, for the purpose of riding him on a rail; but that gentleman was nowhere to be found. He had vanished, no one could tell how; and not even the ghost of him has ever been seen since.

Unable to discover its legitimate object, the popular fury at length subsided; leaving behind it, by way of sediment, quite a medley of

opinion about this unhappy affair.

One gentleman thought the whole an X-ellent joke.

Another said that, indeed, Bullet-head had shown much X-uberance of fancy.

A third admitted him X-entric, but no more.

A fourth could only suppose it the Yankee's design to X-press, in a general way, his X-asperation.

'Say, rather, to set an X-ample to posterity,' suggested a fifth.

That Bullet-head had been driven to an extremity, was clear to all; and in fact, since that editor could not be found, there was some talk about lynching the other one.

The more common conclusion, however, was that the affair was, simply, X-traordinary and in-X-plicable. Even the town mathematician confessed that he could make nothing of so dark a problem. X, every. body knew, was an unknown quantity; but in this case (as he properly observed), there was an unknown quantity of X.

The opinion of Bob, the devil (who kept dark about his having 'X-ed the paragrab'), did not meet with so much attention as I think it deserved, although it was very openly and very fearlessly expressed. He said that, for his part, he had no doubt about the matter at all, that it was a clear case, that Mr. Bullet-head 'never could be persuaded fur to drink like other folks, but vas continually a-svigging o' that ere blessed XXX ale, and as a naiteral consekvence, it just puffed him up savage, and made him X (cross) in the X-treme.'

YOHRZEIT FOR MOTHER by S. Libin (Israel Horowitz)
from Yiddish Tales, EBook #33707

The Ginzburgs' first child died of inflammation of the lungs when it was two years and three months old.

The young couple were in the depths of grief and despair--they even thought seriously of committing suicide.

But people do not do everything they think of doing. Neither Ginzburg nor his wife had the courage to throw themselves into the cold and grizzly arms of death. They only despaired, until, some time after, a newborn child bound them once more to life.

It was a little girl, and they named her Dvoreh, after Ginzburg's dead mother.

The Ginzburgs were both free-thinkers in the full sense of the word, and their naming the child after the dead had no superstitious significance whatever.

It came about quite simply.

"Dobinyu," Ginzburg had asked his wife, "how shall we call our daughter?"

"I don't know," replied the young mother.

"No more do I," said Ginzburg.

"Let us call her Dvorehle," suggested Dobe, automatically, gazing at her pretty baby, and very little concerned about its name.

Had Ginzburg any objection to make? None at all, and the child's name was Dvorehle henceforward. When the first child had lived to be a year old, the parents had made a feast-day, and invited guests to celebrate their first-born's first birthday with them.

With the second child it was not so.

The Ginzburgs loved their Dvorehle, loved her painfully, infinitely, but when it came to the anniversary of her birth they made no rejoicings.

I do not think I shall be going too far if I say they did not dare to do so.

Dvorehle was an uncommon child: a bright girlie, sweet-tempered, pretty, and clever, the light of the house, shining into its every corner. She could be a whole world of delight to her parents, this wee Dvorehle. But it was not the delight, not the happiness they had known with the first child, not the same. _That_ had been so free, so careless. Now it was different: terrible pictures of death, of a child's death, would rise up in the midst of their joy, and their gladness suddenly ended in a heavy sigh. They would be at the height of enchantment, kissing and hugging the child and laughing aloud, they would be singing to it and romping with it, everything else would be forgotten. Then, without wishing to do so, they would suddenly remember that not so long ago it was another child, also a girl, that went off into just the same silvery little bursts of laughter--and now, where is it?--dead! O how it goes through the heart! The parents turn pale in the midst of their merrymaking, the mother's eyes fill with tears, and the father's head droops.

"Who knows?" sighs Dobe, looking at their little laughing Dvorehle. "Who knows?"

Ginzburg understands the meaning of her question and is silent, because he is afraid to say anything in reply.

It seems to me that parents who have buried their first-born can never be really happy again.

So Dvorehle's first birthday was allowed to pass as it were unnoticed. When it came to her second, it was nearly the same thing, only Dobe said, "Ginzburg, when our daughter is three years old, then we will have great rejoicings!"

They waited for the day with trembling hearts. Their child's third year was full of terror for them, because their eldest-born had died in her third year, and they felt as though it must be the most dangerous one for their second child.

A dreadful conviction began to haunt them both, only they were afraid to confess it one to the other. This conviction, this fixed idea of theirs, was that when Dvorehle reached the age of their eldest child when it died, Death would once more call their household to mind.

Dvorehle grew to be two years and eight months old. O it was a terrible time! And--and the child fell ill, with inflammation of the lungs, just like the other one.

O pictures that arose and stood before the parents! O terror, O calamity! They were free-thinkers, the Ginzburgs, and if any one had told them that they were not free from what they called superstition, that the belief in a Higher Power beyond our understanding still had a root in their being, if you had spoken thus to Ginzburg or to his wife, they would have laughed at you, both of them, out of the depths of a full heart and with laughter more serious than many another's words. But what happened now is wonderful to tell.

Dobe, sitting by the sick child's cot, began to speak, gravely, and as in a dream:

"Who knows? Who knows? Perhaps? Perhaps?" She did not conclude.

"Perhaps what?" asked Ginzburg, impatiently.

"Why should it come like this?" Dobe went on. "The same time, the same sickness?"

"A simple blind coincidence of circumstances," replied her husband.

"But so exactly--one like the other, as if somebody had made it happen on purpose."

Ginzburg understood his wife's meaning, and answered short and sharp:

"Dobe, don't talk nonsense."

Meanwhile Dvoreh's illness developed, and the day came on which the doctor said that a crisis would occur within twenty-four hours. What this meant to the Ginzburgs would be difficult to describe, but each of them determined privately not to survive the loss of their second child.

They sat beside it, not lifting their eyes from its face. They were pale and dazed with grief and sleepless nights, their hearts half-dead within them, they shed no tears, they were so much more dead than alive themselves, and the child's flame of life flickered and dwindled, flickered and dwindled.

A tangle of memories was stirring in Ginzburg's head, all relating to deaths and graves. He lived through the death of their first child with all details--his father's death, his mother's--early in a summer morning--that was--that was--he recalls it--as though it were to-day.

"What is to-day?" he wonders. "What day of the month is it?" And then he remembers, it is the first of May.

"The same day," he murmurs, as if he were talking in his sleep.

"What the same day?" asks Dobe.

"Nothing," says Ginzburg. "I was thinking of something."

He went on thinking, and fell into a doze where he sat.

He saw his mother enter the room with a soft step, take a chair, and sit down by the sick child.

"Mother, save it!" he begs her, his heart is full to bursting, and he begins to cry.

"Isrolik," says his mother, "I have brought a remedy for the child that bears my name."

"Mame!!!"

He is about to throw himself upon her neck and kiss her, but she motions him lightly aside.

"Why do you never light a candle for my Yohrzeit?" she inquires, and looks at him reproachfully.

"Mame, have pity on us, save the child!"

"The child will live, only you must light me a candle."

"Mame" (he sobs louder), "have pity!"

"Light my candle--make haste, make haste--"

"Ginzburg!" a shriek from his wife, and he awoke with a start.

"Ginzburg, the child is dying! Fly for the doctor."

Ginzburg cast a look at the child, a chill went through him, he ran to the door.

The doctor came in person.

"Our child is dying! Help save it!" wailed the unhappy mother, and he, Ginzburg, stood and shivered as with cold.

The doctor scrutinized the child, and said:

"The crisis is coming on." There was something dreadful in the quiet of his tone.

"What can be done?" and the Ginzburgs wrung their hands.

"Hush! Nothing! Bring some hot water, bottles of hot water!--Champagne!--Where is the medicine? Quick!" commanded the doctor.

Everything was to hand and ready in an instant.

The doctor began to busy himself with the child, the parents stood by pale as death.

"Well," asked Dobe, "what?"

"We shall soon know," said the doctor.

Ginzburg looked round, glided like a shadow into a corner of the room, and lit the little lamp that stood there.

"What is that for?" asked Dobe, in a fright.

"Nothing, Yohrzeit--my mother's," he answered in a strange voice, and his hands never ceased trembling.

"Your child will live," said the doctor, and father and mother fell upon the child's bed with their faces, and wept.

The flame in the lamp burnt brighter and brighter.

ZUT by Guy W. Carryl

from Lords of the Housetops – Thirteen Cat Tales, EBook #30092

Side by side, on the avenue de la Grande Armée, stand the épicerie of Jean-Baptiste Caille and the salle de coiffure of Hippolyte Sergeot, and between these two there is a great gulf fixed, the which has come to be through the acerbity of Alexandrine Caille (according to Espérance Sergeot), though the duplicity of Espérance Sergeot (according to Alexandrine Caille). But the veritable root of all evil is Zut, and Zut sits smiling in Jean-Baptiste's doorway, and cares naught for anything in the world, save the sunlight and her midday meal.

When Hippolyte found himself in a position to purchase the salle de coiffure, he gave evidence of marked acumen by uniting himself in the holy--and civil--bonds of matrimony with the retiring patron's daughter, whose dot ran into the coveted five figures, and whose heart, said Hippolyte, was as good as her face was pretty, which, even by the unprejudiced, was acknowledged to be forcible commendation. The installation of the new establishment was a nine days' wonder in the quartier. It is a busy thoroughfare at its western end, is the avenue de la Grande Armée, crowded with bicyclists and with a multitude of creatures fearfully and wonderfully clad, who do incomprehensible things in connection with motor-carriages. Also there are big cafés in plenty, whose waiters must be smoothly shaven: and moreover, at the time when Hippolyte came into his own, the porte Maillot station of the Métropolitain had already pushed its entrée and sortie up through the soil, not a hundred metres from his door, where they stood like atrocious yellow tulips, art nouveau, breathing people out and in by thousands. There was no lack of possible custom. The problem was to turn possible into probable, and probable into permanent; and here the seven wits and the ten thousand francs of Espérance came prominently to the fore. She it was who sounded the progressive note, which is half the secret of success.

"Pour attirer les gens," she said, with her arms akimbo, "il faut d'abord les épater."

In her creed all that was worth doing at all was worth doing gloriously.

So, under her guidance, Hippolyte journeyed from shop to shop in the faubourg St. Antoine, and spent hours of impassioned argument with carpenters and decorators. In the end, the *salle de coiffure* was glorified by fresh paint without and within, and by the addition of a long mirror in a gilt frame, and a complicated apparatus of gleaming nickel-plate, which went by the imposing title of *appareil antiseptique*, and the acquisition of which was duly proclaimed by a special placard that swung at right angles to the door. The shop was rechristened, too, and the black and white sign across its front which formerly bore the simple inscription "Kilbert, Coiffeur," now blazoned abroad the vastly more impressive legend "Salon Malakoff." The window shelves fairly groaned beneath their burden of soaps, toilet waters, and perfumery, a string of bright yellow sponges occupied each corner of the window, and, through the agency of white enamel letters on the pane itself, public attention was drawn to the apparently contradictory facts that English was spoken and "schampooing" given within. Then Hippolyte engaged two assistants, and clad them in white duck jackets, and his wife fabricated a new blouse of blue silk, and seated herself behind the desk with an engaging smile. The enterprise was fairly launched, and experience was not slow in proving the theories of *Espérance* to be well founded. The quartier was *épaté* from the start, and took with enthusiasm the bait held forth. The affairs of the Salon Malakoff prospered prodigiously.

But there is a serpent in every Eden, and in that of the Sergeot this rôle was assumed by Alexandrine Caille. The worthy *épicier* himself was of too torpid a temperament to fall a victim to the gnawing tooth of envy, but in the soul of his wife the launch, and, what was worse, the immediate prosperity of the Salon Malakoff, bred dire resentment. Her own establishment had grown grimy with the passage of time, and the annual profits displayed a constant and disturbing tendency toward complete evaporation, since the coming of the big *cafés*, and the resultant subversion of custom to the wholesale dealers. This persistent narrowing of the former appreciable gap between purchase and selling price rankled in Alexandrine's mind, but her misguided efforts to maintain the percentage of profit by recourse to inferior qualities only made bad worse, and, even as the Sergeot were steering the Salon Malakoff forth upon the waters of prosperity, there were nightly

conferences in the household next door, at which impending ruin presided, and exasperation sounded the keynote of every sentence. The resplendent façade of Hippolyte's establishment, the tide of custom which poured into and out of his door, the loudly expressed admiration of his ability and thrift, which greeted her ears on every side, and, finally, the sight of Espérance, fresh, smiling, and prosperous, behind her little counter--all these were as gall and wormwood to Alexandrine, brooding over her accumulating debts and her decreasing earnings, among her dusty stacks of jars and boxes. Once she had called upon her neighbour, somewhat for courtesy's sake, but more for curiosity's, and since then the agreeable scent of violet and lilac perfumery dwelt always in her memory, and mirages of scrupulously polished nickel and glass hung always before her eyes. The air of her own shop was heavy with the pungent odours of raw vegetables, cheeses, and dried fish, and no brilliance redeemed the sardine and biscuit boxes which surrounded her. Life became a bitter thing to Alexandrine Caille, for if nothing is more gratifying than one's own success, surely nothing is less so than that of one's neighbour. Moreover, her visit had never been returned, and this again was fuel for her rage.

But the sharpest thorn in her flesh--and even in that of her phlegmatic husband--was the base desertion to the enemy's camp of Abel Flique. In the days when Madame Caille was unmarried, and when her ninety kilos were fifty still, Abel had been youngest commis in the very shop over which she now held sway, and the most devoted suitor in all her train. Even after his prowess in the black days of '71 had won him the attention of the civil authorities, and a grateful municipality had transformed the grocer-soldier into a guardian of law and order, he still hung upon the favour of his heart's first love, and only gave up the struggle when Jean-Baptiste bore off the prize and enthroned her in state as presiding genius of his newly acquired épicerie. Later, an unwittingly kindly prefect had transferred Abel to the seventeenth arrondissement, and so the old friendship was picked up where it had been dropped, and the ruddy-faced agent found it both convenient and agreeable to drop in frequently at Madame Caille's on his way home, and exchange a few words of reminiscence or banter for a box of sardines or a minute package of tea. But, with the deterioration in his old friends' wares, and the almost simultaneous appearance of the Salon Malakoff, his

loyalty wavered. Flique sampled the advantages of Hippolyte's establishment, and, being won over thereby, returned again and again. His hearty laugh came to be heard almost daily in the *salle de coiffure*, and because he was a brave homme and a good customer, who did not stand upon a question of a few sous, but allowed Hippolyte to work his will, and trim and curl and perfume him to his heart's content, there was always a welcome for him, and a smile from Madame Sergeot, and occasionally a little present of brillantine or perfumery, for friendship's sake, and because it is well to have the good-will of the all-powerful police.

From her window Madame Caille observed the comings and goings of Abel with a resentful eye. It was rarely now that he glanced into the *épicerie* as he passed, and still more rarely that he greeted his former flame with a stiff nod. Once she had hailed him from the doorway, sardines in hand, but he had replied that he was pressed for time, and had passed rapidly on. Then indeed did blackness descend upon the soul of Alexandrine, and in her deepest consciousness she vowed to have revenge. Neither the occasion nor the method was as yet clear to her, but she pursed her lips ominously, and bided her time.

In the existence of Madame Caille there was one emphatic consolation for all misfortunes, the which was none other than Zut, a white angora cat of surpassing beauty and prodigious size. She had come into Alexandrine's possession as a kitten, and, what with much eating and an inherent distaste for exercise, had attained her present proportions and her superb air of unconcern. It was from the latter that she derived her name, the which, in Parisian argot, at once means everything and nothing, but is chiefly taken to signify complete and magnificent indifference to all things mundane and material: and in the matter of indifference Zut was past-mistress. Even for Madame Caille herself, who fed her with the choicest morsels from her own plate, brushed her fine fur with excessive care, and addressed caressing remarks to her at minute intervals throughout the day, Zut manifested a lack of interest that amounted to contempt. As she basked in the warm sun at the shop door, the round face of her mistress beamed upon her from the little desk, and the voice of her mistress sent fulsome flattery winging toward her on the heavy air. Was she beautiful, *mon Dieu*! In effect, all that

one could dream of the most beautiful! And her eyes, of a blue like the heaven, were they not wise and calm? Mon Dieu, yes! It was a cat among thousands, a mimi almost divine.

Jean-Baptiste, appealed to for confirmation of these statements, replied that it was so. There was no denying that this was a magnificent beast. And of a chic. And caressing--(which was exaggeration). And of an affection--(which was doubtful). And courageous--(which was wholly untrue). Mazette, yes! A cat of cats! And was the boy to be the whole afternoon in delivering a cheese, he demanded of her? And Madame Caille would challenge him to ask her that--but it was a good, great beast all the same!--and so bury herself again in her accounts, until her attention was once more drawn to Zut, and fresh flattery poured forth. For all of this Zut cared less than nothing. In the midst of her mistress's sweetest cajolery, she simply closed her sapphire eyes, with an inexpressibly eloquent air of weariness, or turned to the intricacies of her toilet, as who should say: "Continue. I am listening. But it is unimportant."

But long familiarity with her disdain had deprived it of any sting, so far as Alexandrine was concerned. Passive indifference she could suffer. It was only when Zut proceeded to an active manifestation of ingratitude that she inflicted an irremediable wound. Returning from her marketing one morning, Madame Caille discovered her graceless favourite seated complacently in the doorway of the Salon Malakoff, and, in a paroxysm of indignation, bore down upon her, and snatched her to her breast.

"Unhappy one!" she cried, planting herself in full view of Espérance, and, while raining the letter of her reproach upon the truant, contriving to apply its spirit wholly to her neighbour. "What hast thou done? Is it that thou desertest me for strangers, who may destroy thee? Name of a name, hast thou no heart? They would steal thee from me--and above all, _now_! Well then, no! One shall see if such things are permitted! Vagabond!" And with this parting shot, which passed harmlessly over the head of the offender, and launched itself full at Madame Sergeot, the outraged épicière flounced back into her own domain, where, turning, she threatened the empty air with a passionate gesture.

"Vagabond!" she repeated. "Good-for-nothing! Is it not enough to have robbed me of my friends, that you must steal my child as well? We shall see!"--then, suddenly softening--"Thou art beautiful, and good, and wise. Mon Dieu, if I should lose thee, and above all, _now_!"

Now there existed a marked, if unvoiced, community of feeling between Espérance and her resentful neighbour, for the former's passion for cats was more consuming even than the latter's. She had long cherished the dream of possessing a white angora, and when, that morning, of her own accord, Zut stepped into the Salon Malakoff, she was received with demonstrations even warmer than those to which she had long since become accustomed. And, whether it was the novelty of her surroundings, or merely some unwonted instinct which made her unusually susceptible, her habitual indifference then and there gave place to animation, and her satisfaction was vented in her long, appreciative purr, wherewith it was not once a year that she vouchsafed to gladden her owner's heart. Espérance hastened to prepare a saucer of milk, and, when this was exhausted, added a generous portion of fish, and Zut then made a tour of the shop, rubbing herself against the chair-legs, and receiving the homage of customers and duck-clad assistants alike. Flique, his ruddy face screwed into a mere knot of features, as Hippolyte worked violet hair-tonic into his brittle locks, was moved to satire by the apparition.

"Tiens! It is with the cat as with the clients. All the world forsakes the Caille."

Strangely enough, the wrathful words of Alexandrine, as she snatched her darling from the doorway, awoke in the mind of Espérance her first suspicion of this smouldering resentment. Absorbed in the launching of her husband's affairs, and constantly employed in the making of change and with the keeping of her simple accounts, she had had no time to bestow upon her neighbours, and, even had her attention been free, she could hardly have been expected to deduce the rancour of Madame Caille from the evidence at hand. But even if she had been able to ignore the significance of that furious outburst at her very door, its meaning had not been lost upon the others, and her own half-formed conviction was speedily confirmed.

"What has she?" cried Hippolyte, pausing in the final stage of his operations upon the highly perfumed Flique.

"Do I know?" replied his wife with a shrug. "She thinks I stole her cat--_I_!"

"Quite simply, she hates you," put in Flique. "And why not? She is old, and fat, and her business is taking itself off, like that! You are young and"--with a bow, as he rose--"beautiful, and your affairs march to a marvel. She is jealous, c'est tout! It is a bad character, that."

"But, mon Dieu!"--

"But what does that say to you? Let her go her way, she and her cat. Au r'voir, 'sieurs, 'dame."

And, rattling a couple of sous into the little urn reserved for tips, the policeman took his departure, amid a chorus of "Merci, m'sieu', au r'voir, m'sieu'," from Hippolyte and his duck-clad aids.

But what he had said remained behind. All day Madame Sergeot pondered upon the incident of the morning and Abel Flique's comments thereupon, seeking out some more plausible reason for this hitherto unsuspected enmity than the mere contrast between her material conditions and those of Madame Caille seemed to her to afford. For, to a natural placidity of temperament, which manifested itself in a reluctance to incur the displeasure of any one, had been lately added in Espérance a shrewd commercial instinct, which told her that the fortunes of the Salon Malakoff might readily be imperilled by an unfriendly tongue. In the quartier, gossip spread quickly and took deep root. It was quite imaginably within the power of Madame Caille to circulate such rumours of Sergeot dishonesty as should draw their lately won custom from them and leave but empty chairs and discontent where now all was prosperity and satisfaction.

Suddenly there came to her the memory of that visit which she had never returned. Mon Dieu! and was not that reason enough? She, the youngest

patronne in the quartier, to ignore deliberately the friendly call of a neighbour! At least it was not too late to make amends. So, when business lagged a little in the late afternoon, Madame Sergeot slipped from her desk, and, after a furtive touch to her hair, went in next door, to pour oil upon the troubled waters.

Madame Caille, throned at her counter, received her visitor with unexampled frigidity.

"Ah, it is you," she said. "You have come to make some purchases, no doubt."

"Eggs, madame," answered her visitor, disconcerted, but tactfully accepting the hint.

"The best quality--or--?" demanded Alexandrine, with the suggestion of a sneer.

"The best, evidently, madame. Six, if you please. Spring weather at last, it would seem."

To this generality the other made no reply. Descending from her stool, she blew sharply into a small paper bag, thereby distending it into a miniature balloon, and began selecting the eggs from a basket, holding each one to the light, and then dusting it with exaggerated care before placing it in the bag. While she was thus employed Zut advanced from a secluded corner, and, stretching her fore legs slowly to their utmost length, greeted her acquaintance of the morning with a yawn. Finding in the cat an outlet for her embarrassment, Espérance made another effort to give the interview a friendly turn.

"He is beautiful, madame, your matou," she said.

"It is a female," replied Madame Caille, turning abruptly from the basket, "and she does not care for strangers."

This second snub was not calculated to encourage neighbourly overtures, but Madame Sergeot had felt herself to be in the wrong, and was not to

be so readily repulsed.

"We do not see Monsieur Caille at the Salon Malakoff," she continued.
"We should be enchanted"--

"My husband shaves himself," retorted Alexandrine, with renewed dignity.

"But his hair"--ventured Espérance.

"_I_ cut it!" thundered her foe.

Here Madame Sergeot made a false move. She laughed. Then, in confusion, and striving, too late, to retrieve herself--"Pardon, madame," she added, "but it seems droll to me, that. After all, ten sous is a sum so small"--

"All the world, unfortunately," broke in Madame Caille, "has not the wherewithal to buy mirrors, and pay itself frescoes and appareils antiseptiques! The eggs are twenty-four sous--but we do not pride ourselves upon our eggs. Perhaps you had better seek them elsewhere for the future!"

For sole reply Madame Sergeot had recourse to her expressive shrug, and then laying two francs upon the counter, and gathering up the sous which Alexandrine rather hurled at than handed her, she took her way toward the door with all the dignity at her command. But Madame Caille, feeling her snub to have been insufficient, could not let her go without a final thrust.

"Perhaps your husband will be so amiable as to shampoo my cat!" she shouted. "She seems to like your 'Salon'!"

But Espérance, while for concord's sake inclined to tolerate all rudeness to herself, was not prepared to hear Hippolyte insulted, and so, wheeling at the doorway, flung all her resentment into two words.

"Mal élevée!"

"Gueuse!" screamed Alexandrine from the desk. And so they parted.

Now, even at this stage, an armed truce might still have been preserved, had Zut been content with the evil she had wrought, and not thought it incumbent upon her further to embitter a quarrel that was a very pretty quarrel as it stood. But, whether it was that the milk and fish of the Salon Malakoff lay sweeter upon her memory than any of the familiar dainties of the épicerie Caille, or that, by her unknowable feline instinct, she was irresistibly drawn toward the scent of violet and lilac brillantine, her first visit to the Sergeot was soon repeated, and from this visit other visits grew, until it was almost a daily occurrence for her to saunter slowly into the salle de coiffure, and there receive the food and homage which were rendered as her undisputed due. For, whatever was the bitterness of Espérance toward Madame Caille, no part thereof descended upon Zut. On the contrary, at each visit her heart was more drawn toward the sleek angora, and her desire but strengthened to possess her peer. But white angoras are a luxury, and an expensive one at that, and, however prosperous the Salon Malakoff might be, its proprietors were not as yet in a position to squander eighty francs upon a whim. So, until profits should mount higher, Madame Sergeot was forced to content herself with the voluntary visits of her neighbour's pet.

Madame Caille did not yield her rights of sovereignty without a struggle. On the occasion of Zut's third visit, she descended upon the Salon Malakoff, robed in wrath, and found the adored one contentedly feeding on fish in the very bosom of the family Sergeot. An appalling scene ensued.

"If," she stormed, crimson of countenance, and threatening Espérance with her fist, "if you _must_ entice my cat from her home, at _least_ I will thank you not to give her food. I provide all that is necessary; and, for the rest, how do I know what is in that saucer?"

And she surveyed the duck-clad assistants and the astounded customers with tremendous scorn.

"You others," she added, "I ask you, is it just? These people take my

cat, and feed her--_feed_ her--with I know not what! It is overwhelming, unheard of--and, above all, _now_!"

But here the peaceful Hippolyte played trumps.

"It is the privilege of the vulgar," he cried, advancing, razor in hand, "when they are at home, to insult their neighbours, but here--no! My wife has told me of you and of your sayings. Beware! or I shall arrange your affair for you! Go! you and your cat!"

And, by way of emphasis, he fairly kicked Zut into her astonished owner's arms. He was magnificent, was Hippolyte!

This anecdote, duly elaborated, was poured into the ears of Abel Flique an hour later, and that evening he paid his first visit in many months to Madame Caille. She greeted him effusively, being willing to pardon all the past for the sake of regaining this powerful friend. But the glitter in the agent's eye would have cowed a fiercer spirit than hers.

"You amuse yourself," he said sternly, looking straight at her over the handful of raisins which she tendered him, "by wearying my friends. I counsel you to take care. One does not sell inferior eggs in Paris without hearing of it sooner or later. I know more than I have told, but not more than I _can_ tell, if I choose."

"Our ancient friendship"--faltered Alexandrine, touched in a vulnerable spot.

"--preserves you thus far," added Flique, no less unmoved. "Beware how you abuse it!"

And so the calls of Zut were no longer disturbed.

But the rover spirit is progressive, and thus short visits became long visits, and finally the angora spent whole nights in the Salon Malakoff, where a box and a bit of carpet were provided for her. And one fateful morning the meaning of Madame Caille's significant words "and above all, _now_!" was made clear.

The prosperity of Hippolyte's establishment had grown apace, so that, on the morning in question, the three chairs were occupied, and yet other customers awaited their turn. The air was laden with violet and lilac. A stout chauffeur, in a leather suit, thickly coated with dust, was undergoing a shampoo at the hands of one of the duck-clad, and, under the skilfully plied razor of the other, the virgin down slid from the lips and chin of a slim and somewhat startled youth, while from a vaporizer Hippolyte played a fine spray of perfumed water upon the ruddy countenance of Abel Flique. It was an eloquent moment, eminently fitted for some dramatic incident, and that dramatic incident Zut supplied. She advanced slowly and with an air of conscious dignity from the corner where was her carpeted box, and in her mouth was a limp something, which, when deposited in the immediate centre of the Salon Malakoff, resolved itself into an angora kitten, as white as snow!

"Epatant!" said Flique, mopping his perfumed chin. And so it was.

There was an immediate investigation of Zut's quarters, which revealed four other kittens, but each of these was marked with black or tan. It was the flower of the flock with which the proud mother had won her public.

"And they are all yours!" cried Flique, when the question of ownership arose. "Mon Dieu, yes! There was such a case not a month ago, in the eighth arrondissement--a concierge of the avenue Hoche who made a contrary claim. But the courts decided against her. They are all yours, Madame Sergeot. My felicitations!"

Now, as we have said, Madame Sergeot was of a placid temperament which sought not strife. But the unprovoked insults of Madame Caille had struck deep, and, after all, she was but human.

So it was that, seated at her little desk, she composed the following masterpiece of satire:

CHÈRE MADAME,--We send you back your cat, and the others--all but one. One kitten was of a pure white, more beautiful even than its

mother. As we have long desired a white angora, we keep this one as a souvenir of you. We regret that we do not see the means of accepting the kind offer you were so amiable as to make us. We fear that we shall not find time to shampoo your cat, as we shall be so busy taking care of our own. Monsieur Flique will explain the rest.

We pray you to accept, madame, the assurance of our distinguished consideration,

HIPPOLYTE AND ESPÉRANCE SERGEOT.

It was Abel Flique who conveyed the above epistle, and Zut, and four of Zut's kittens, to Alexandrine Caille, and, when that wrathful person would have rent him with tooth and nail, it was Abel Flique who laid his finger on his lip, and said,--

"Concern yourself with the superior kitten, madame, and I concern myself with the inferior eggs!"

To which Alexandrine made no reply. After Flique had taken his departure, she remained speechless for five consecutive minutes for the first time in the whole of her waking existence, gazing at the spot at her feet where sprawled the white angora, surrounded by her mottled offspring. Even when the first shock of her defeat had passed, she simply heaved a deep sigh, and uttered two words,--

"Oh, _Zut_!"

The which, in Parisian argot, at once means everything and nothing.

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